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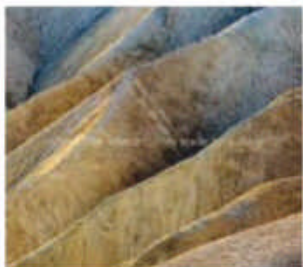
*A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada*

### JL Adams

Lines Made by Walking. untouched

Jack Quartet

Cold Blue Music © CB0058 (55' • DDD)



Patrick Kilbey's Contemporary Composers profile (2/18) of John

Luther Adams (b1953) remains the best general introduction to the music of this distinctive American composer. In that article, Kilbey did not specifically discuss any of Adams's (to date) five string quartets but many of his comments hold good for them, too: the connection to Adams's music of nature, specifically its being 'the physics of sound', 'geography and geology'.

It should come as no surprise that Adams's first quartet (2011; he does not overtly number them) was *The Wind in High Places*, in which the composer reimagined the quartet as a '16-string Aeolian harp'. *untouched* (2016), the next quartet and the first recorded here, revisited that same ethereal sound world, with 'the fingers of the musicians still not touching their fingerboards'. Of fairly equal durations, the three movements, 'Rising', 'Crossing' and 'Falling', seem to describe an arch shape, like the rise and fall of a bird high over a range of hills. There is little variety of the glassy timbre or near-glacial tempo.

The most recent quartet, *Lines Made by Walking* (2019), is another triptych describing a simple arch, the movement titles indicating something of a programme. The upward- and downward-striving motions – again, with a very slow pulse – of the outer movements, 'Up the Mountain' and 'Down the Mountain', are straightforward, but more as metaphors rather than overt description, again relying on minutely varied repetition to generate momentum. Like them, the central 'Along the Ridges' is contemplative in its expressive disposition.

Both works are of a piece with Adams's larger and better-known works and will

undoubtedly appeal to enthusiasts. It will not appeal to everyone, but rest assured that the Jack Quartet's committed performances are a model of flawless ensemble and intonation, captured in very clear sound. **Guy Rickards**

### Golijov

Falling Out of Time

Silkroad Ensemble

In a Circle Records © ICRO17 (80' • DDD • T)



Though conceived and created well before the pandemic, Osvaldo Golijov's

latest collaboration with Silkroad Ensemble seems uncannily well suited to the era of corona. Global in its impact, the affliction is at the same time responsible for countless private griefs. *Falling Out of Time*, for its part, navigates a space between the archetypal and the individual pain we confront with every impossible loss. Similarly, this 80-minute work inspired by David Grossman's novel of the same name evokes a sense of the simultaneous absurdity and necessity of art that our latter-day plague has provoked. As Grossman observes in the elegant album booklet: 'But there is one place, or rather one dimension, where we can feel, if only for an instant, both the absolute nihility of death and the full abundance of life. And that dimension is art.'

The Israeli author, who won the Man Booker International Prize in 2017 for *A Horse Walks Into a Bar*, published *Falling Out of Time* in 2014 in response to the loss of his son to war. Golijov structures this tale of a nameless Man and Woman attempting to come to terms with their son's death into an engrossing, immersive song-cycle he calls a 'tone poem in voices'. Its generic flexibility – in live performance, one can readily imagine visual accompaniment and staging – mirrors the hybrid quality of Grossman's unique blend of prose, poetry, folklore and modern fable.

Golijov draws on Silkroad's globe-spanning roster of virtuosos to shape a singular soundscape that marries impulses from Central Asian song epic, Delta blues and ruminative minimalist patterns.

*Falling Out of Time* is beautifully scored for a chamber ensemble of string quintet, kamancheh, pipa, trumpet/flugelhorn, electronics, percussion and sheng, with three singers: Wu Tong (who doubles on sheng) as the grieving father who becomes Walking Man, searching for answers from his departed son; Venezuelan vocalist Biella da Costa as the Woman, who sees at once the futility of her husband's odyssey; and Dutch soprano Nora Fischer as Centaur, a metaphor for the artist.

Following a difficult period, Golijov's career is back on track here. His searing new score recalls the ardent honesty of his breakthrough *Pasión según San Marco* but operates on a much more intimate level. From sky-piercing calls to the haunting reverse lullaby – boy to parents – that concludes it, *Falling Out of Time* is a *Kindertotenlied* for our fragile present.

**Thomas May**

### Shuying Li

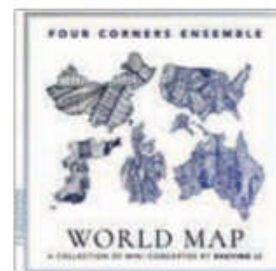
'World Map – A Collection of Mini Concertos'

American Variations. Canton Snowstorm.

The Dryad. Matilda's Dream. The Peace House

Four Corners Ensemble

Navona © NV6312 (59' • DDD)



Shuying Li (b1989) is a Chinese-born, American-resident composer. She

studied initially at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music but won a scholarship to study in the United States, eventually graduating from the University of Michigan. In 2017 she co-founded the Four Corners Ensemble with an international group of young soloists and the World Map Concertos Series (2018-19) is the first major compositional product of this partnership. The five miniature concertos – once apiece for flute, clarinet,





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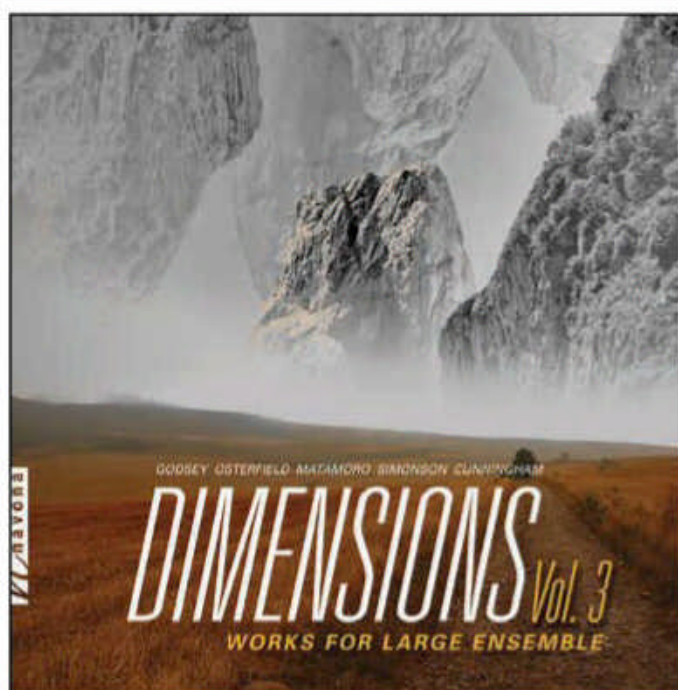
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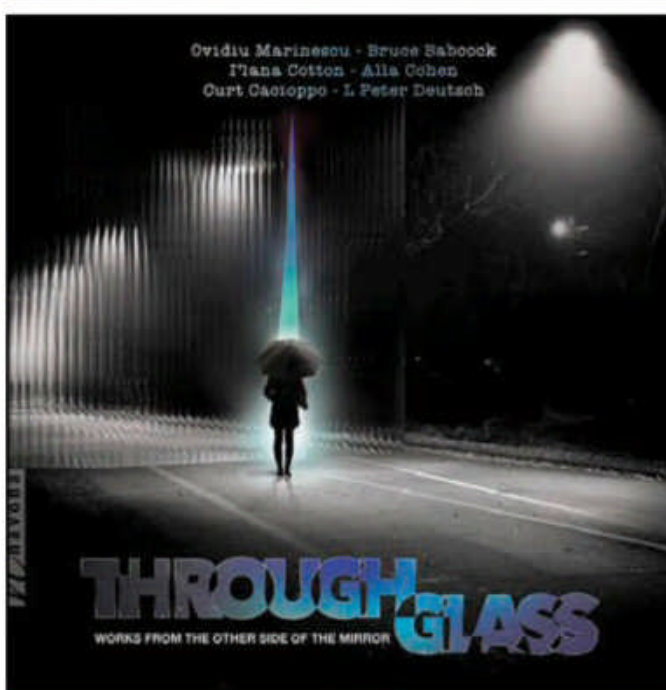
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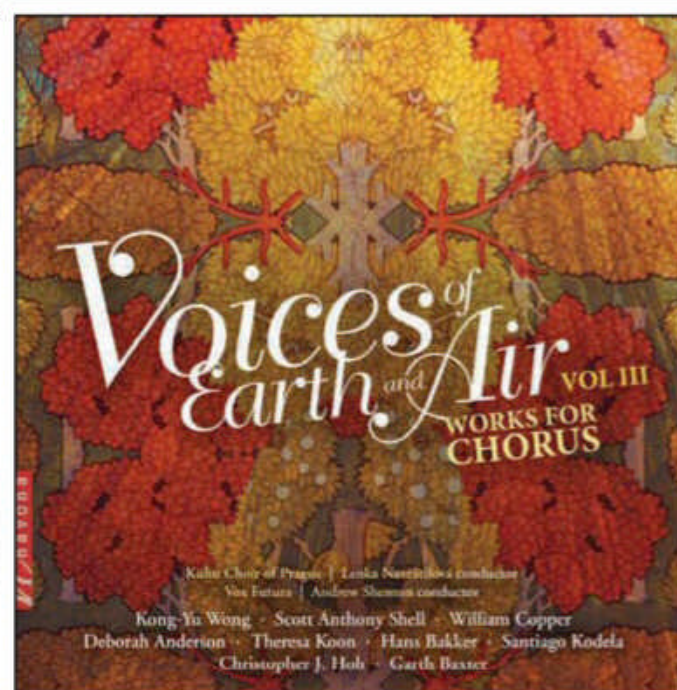
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Flawless: the Jack Quartet make the best possible case for music by John Luther Adams – see review on page 1

piano, violin and cello – are all quintets, the other four instruments accompanying the soloist.

Each concerto takes inspiration from a specific country. *American Variations* is a winning mash-up of ragtime, jazz (with a fleeting allusion to *Rhapsody in Blue*), klezmer and other styles inspired by the American Dream. *Matilda's Dream*, for cello, is a dark fantasy based on 'Waltzing Matilda', though the Australian folk melody only emerges fully at the close. *The Dryad* looks to Denmark and Austria by contrast, a flute concerto melding Hans Christian Andersen's tale with Schubert's song 'Der Lindenbaum', while *The Peace House* (for violin) is set in Panmunjom on the uneasy border between the two Koreas. Finally, *Canton Snowstorm* (ie the Chinese city, not a Swiss region) is as much a vivid tone poem of a blizzard as a piano concerto. It is a brilliant conclusion to the series, fusing Western and Eastern musical traditions in its volatile soundscape.

The performances are, as one might expect, superbly prepared and executed impeccably. It is invidious to pick out specific soloists from such a beautifully balanced ensemble but both flautist Erika Boysen and clarinetist Joshua Anderson produce beautifully nuanced playing, and

Annie Jeng's brilliant pianism informs all five works. Navona's sound is quite closely miked but clear and bright. An enjoyable disc. **Guy Rickards**

## B Strozzi

**Gianoncelli** Three Correntes **B Strozzi** Arie a voce sola, Op 8 - L'Astratto. Che si può fare. Donne belle. E pazzo mio core. Ferma il piede. Non c'è più fede. Tu me ne puoi ben dire

**Elissa Edwards** sop **Richard Kolb** theorbo/archlute  
Acis © APL90277 (58' • DDD • T/t)



and cantatas from Barbara Strozzi's last published opus showcases the dramatically coloured, highly charged power of the composer's expressive toolkit, lit by the emerging harmonic language of the Baroque, influenced by Monteverdi through her teacher Cavalli, as a serious precedent for the future of opera. In his booklet notes Kolb comments that in Strozzi's time a taste for 'indulgence in the sensual pleasure of vocal melody or as an esoteric manifestation of nothingness' was growing – the future indeed. In

performances that underline those connections, Edwards and Kolb respond to the sheer pleasures of aching emotions, vague desires, delightful comedy and quick-moving, intense melodrama with playing of sheer physical beauty and close attention to the texts, whether Edwards's pliant, seductive, free-ranging voice or Kolb's virtuosity on instruments made by Michael Schreiner after early Baroque models.

The light-hearted parody of 'L'Astratto' turns out to be a miniature 10-minute opera. The deeply felt cantata 'Che si può fare' begins with sheer poetry, introduces an unforgettable tune of sad beauty and ends with a warning addressed to beautiful women, 'Che'l dolersi d'Amore e una follia'. In providing a theatrical variety of sounds as Edwards's partner and in three instrumental Correntes by Bernardo Gianoncelli, Kolb's playing swings with darkly intimate colours and suggestive rhythms.

In fact, the performances are based on Kolb's Complete Works edition, published in 2019 by Cor Donato Editions. The audiophile sound was recorded at The Clarion performing arts centre at Brazosport College, 50 miles south of Houston.

**Laurence Vittes**



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## 'Painted Music'

**Golijov Fish Tale Houghton From the Dreaming**  
**Johanson Painted Music McGuire Suite**  
**Quatra Duo** (Michelle Stanley fl Jeff LaQuatra gtr)  
 Navona © NV6306 (61' • DDD)



This is a deceptively straightforward disc, intended primarily as the debut recording of this husband-and-wife duo. It even opens with a gentle and light Suite by James McGuire (b1944), commissioned by guitarist LaQuatra in 2016 for his 'then-future wife and duo partner'. It was originally in four movements but in 2019 McGuire added two more (the second and sixth), and this is the version given here.

Also in six movements, *Painted Music* (2017) by Bryan Johanson (b1951) is built on a larger scale, nearly twice as long as McGuire's Suite. Styled – not entirely convincingly – a sonata by its composer, the inspiration comes from Paul Klee, with whom Johanson shares a birthday, and the music matches a specific musical form to a Klee artwork: a toccata for the opening 'Senecio', a nocturne for 'Strong Dream' and so on. It is effectively done even if Johanson's compositional ingenuity is stretched to the limit by Klee's imagery.

Of an altogether different level of invention is Osvaldo Golijov's *Fish Tale* (1998), a beguiling, alternately lively and contemplative work that Golijov (b1960) himself likened to a 'watercolor'. In form it is best thought of as a tone poem describing how the composer might

have been a 'hallucinated fish' in a past life! By contrast, the inspiration behind Philip Houghton's triptych *From the Dreaming* (1991, rev 1997) was a prolonged sojourn in the 'central and northern outback' of his native Australia. In the opening 'Cave Painting', Houghton (1954-2017) has the guitar emulate (at several removes) a didgeridoo; the ensuing 'Wildflower' is surprisingly changeable (to reflect the climate, perhaps), while 'Gecko' makes for a splendid scherzo finale.

The performances throughout are immaculate – LaQuatra and Stanley are first-rate players individually but have great ensemble and mutual understanding – and Navona's close-miked sound is bright and clear. A rewarding listen.

**Guy Rickards**

## Cincinnati Music Hall

Our monthly guide to North American venues

**Year opened** 1878

**Architect** Samuel Hannaford

**Capacity** 2439

**Resident ensembles** Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Pops Orchestra

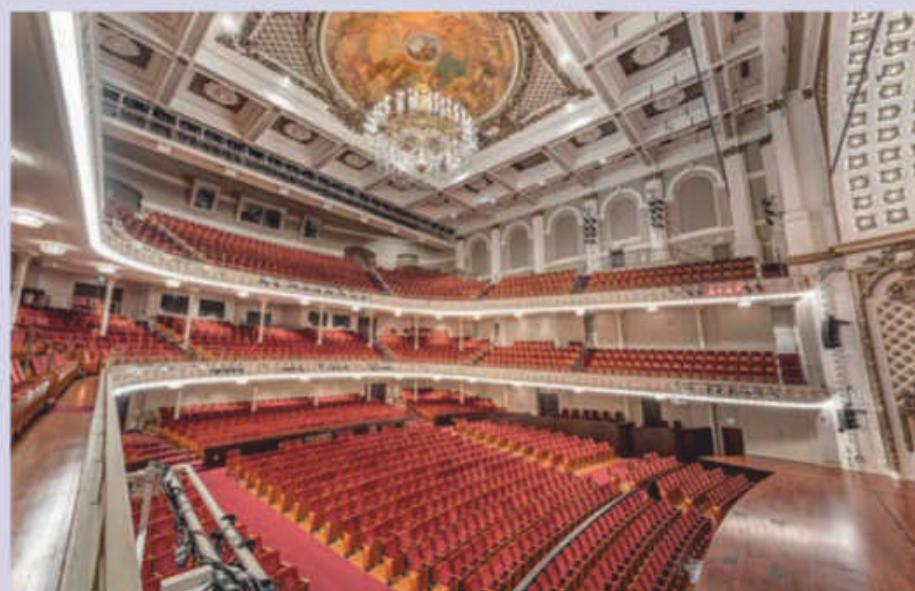
'In the centre of great cities, you have a cathedral or a city hall or a palace of justice. Here in Cincinnati it's Music Hall. A temple of music.' These are the words of Louis Langrée, music director of the Cincinnati Symphony.

Built in 1878, Cincinnati Music Hall serves as home for the city's Ballet, Opera, May Festival and, most important, its Symphony and Pops Orchestras. Recognised as a National Historic Landmark for its Venetian Gothic architecture, it was originally designed to house musical activities in its vast central auditorium – seating 5000 and reduced to 3500 in 1975 – and industrial exhibitions in its splendid flanking wings. It was designed so that when you came into the hall you would immediately feel a sense of beauty and occasion. 'It's a hall in the old tradition,' Louis Langrée told me.

Four years after Langrée was named Music Director in 2013, the hall would successfully undergo a \$143 million, 16-month renovation that resulted in a thousand fewer but more comfortable seats, a new performance studio, more production space and better sound. 'They extended the proscenium by three feet into the hall,' Langrée says, 'and now we have the same acoustics for the winds and the strings.'

'The acoustics were good before,' the orchestra's President Jonathan Martin added, 'but now they've become great.'

Like the Hall, the Cincinnati Symphony was born in the 19th-century surge of Midwest pride in cities like Chicago, St Louis and Detroit alongside similarly iconic and profoundly American baseball teams. Together with the Pops, which joined in 1977, the Symphony breathes its American heritage in its



commitment to commissioning, programming, community and inclusion so that, Martin says, 'its rich past will inform our future'.

The identification was clear on a live-streamed concert of one of Joseph Bologne's violin concertos, played by Augustin Hadelich, and Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* Suite; the opening credits featured stunning images of the Music Hall before Langrée and the strings, wearing masks, and the winds, separated by Plexiglas, made the kind of exhilarating, inspiring music the orchestra is known for.

The day before I spoke to Langrée had been the first time since a massive Beethoven Akademie concert in March that the orchestra could rehearse in the hall. 'It was Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony in B minor, and before the musicians took up their instruments and removed their masks I asked them to hum a B major chord, then B minor. I thought how privileged we were to be able to still make music and to invite people in the hall to make music for them. It was very moving.'

Martin believes that the hall evokes an emotional response that transcends music. 'This is my sixth orchestra and the only parallel relationships I've experienced between a community and a concert hall was Severance Hall in Cleveland. An iconic love of the concert hall, if that's a phrase.' **Laurence Vittes**



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# A LETTER FROM *Seattle*

Thomas May is missing live performances, but he finds roots of optimism and lasting change amid the gloom



It's now been close to eight months and counting since I was last able to attend a live performance – in the conventional sense. That event, a recital programme titled *American Rage* by the intrepid pianist Conrad Tao in Octave 9, Seattle Symphony's experimental haven, proved to be quite memorable on its own terms. His explosive immersion in protest-orientated music by Frederic Rzewski and Julia Wolfe complemented a generous, visionary account of the Copland Piano Sonata and Tao's own improvisations intriguingly filtered through electronics.

But this recital also stands apart, for purely circumstantial reasons, as a turning point in my expectations for live performance for the foreseeable future. Tao's bold programming and incandescent, high-energy style in an intimate space epitomised the singular aura of the live experience that makes concert-going so irreplaceable.

Yet within days, the cancellations began; soon, every engagement I'd been looking forward to covering at the height of the season vanished. But eclipsing the litany of immediate disappointments was the ominous, ineluctable realisation that the disastrous incompetence of the federal government, a historic distrust of arts support and the coronavirus pandemic had merged into a perfect storm to ravage the US cultural landscape.

The end of the world as we knew it – with a crashing halt. Everyone has had to improvise ever since, negotiating ways to survive and reconnect: the institutions we take for granted, the artists who sustain musical life, each audience member who has been atomised and cut off from the essential experience of sharing a live performance in the same space.

Throughout late spring and into the summer, I tried to find nourishment in the ritual of watching archival streams. There were some advantages to the break in my usually hectic schedule of travel and new compositions to be assimilated at warp speed. In lieu of that, I had an opportunity to address some of the endless lacunae in my musical knowledge, alighting on shamefully neglected repertoire and little-known curiosities alike.


But none of this can replace the real thing. Just as the whole process was becoming too predictable, I found encouragement in the Seattle Chamber Music Society's solution to how to carry on with its annual summer festival. Under the guidance of artistic director James Ehnes and outgoing executive director Connie Cooper, SCMS transformed its usual month-long chamber festival to the online medium, with the customary number of concerts and ancillary events.

These were all fresh performances, recorded live with minimal post-production for subsequent streaming – mostly from SCMS's new performance centre in downtown Seattle, though a number of the contributions were filmed in remote locations (including the premiere by flautist Marina Piccinini of an AJ Kernis commission, recorded in the crystal cave of former World War Two bunkers in the Gotthard Pass in Switzerland).

Along with the well-curated programmes and high calibre of the performances, what struck me was that somehow SCMS managed to preserve and convey a local stamp to this unusual edition of the festival. In other words, it felt very much like an event produced by SCMS, featuring many familiar artists, with welcome close-ups of their expressions while performing. A highlight was the completion by the Ehnes Quartet of their passionate and polished Beethoven quartet cycle – begun in the halcyon days of January, when the world seemed innocent still. Naturally I missed the

electricity that comes only with the presence of other audience members, but the whole enterprise felt like another version of the usual experience rather than a pallid substitute.

Perhaps the intimacy of chamber music makes it more amenable to this virtual transformation. But I'm holding out hopes for larger concert experiences and even opera to accomplish something similar – transmitting an experience that preserves a palpable local colour. Later in November, I'm looking forward to an experiment from Seattle Opera. Only in her second season as general director, Christina Scheppelmann has responded to the crisis by keeping a season of live performances in place, including an *Elisir d'amore* (with two-piano accompaniment) that will be fully staged and videotaped for streaming in a way that self-referentially incorporates the new reality of social distancing. Meanwhile, Seattle Symphony will live-stream its delayed world premiere of a new work by Tyshawn Sorey for the cellist Seth Parker Woods, performed as scored for a smaller ensemble live from Benaroya Hall.

Smaller organisations such as Byron Schenkman & Friends and Seattle Modern Orchestra are preserving their identities through online seasons that remain faithful to their missions, which include challenging the canon by presenting under-represented voices. All of this continues the work of rethinking what the 'classical' sphere can mean for 21st-century audiences that had been going on well before coronavirus struck. The strictures imposed by the pandemic are being folded into the larger quest for equity and access; it's as if they've only sped up the urge to imagine the sphere anew. 

*In lieu of my usually hectic schedule, I had an opportunity to address some of the endless lacunae in my musical knowledge*



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# From ancient to modern, hail music's breadth

I find myself writing this on the feast of Saint Cecilia, November 22, just as I prepare to sign off the issue. A Roman martyr from the third century AD, she is of course celebrated today as the patron saint of musicians, an inspirer of verse by the likes of Dryden, Pope and Auden, and of musical tributes, setting such verse, by Purcell, Handel and Britten. The subject of sumptuous paintings from the Renaissance to the pre-Raphaelites, she is generally playing either a string instrument or the organ. Our own Awards logo is based on our striking sculpture of her, today to be found in the former church that houses our offices, in a neo-Gothic niche near where the now lost Willis organ must once have been.

And it's not just music's patron being celebrated today. Saint Cecilia's feast is also, coincidentally or auspiciously, the birthday of a breadth of musical figures who dominate diverse areas of the repertoire embraced by that useful but sometimes awkward classification 'classical'. Just a handful of the most major: Flemish master of the Mass Jacob Obrecht; the composer of guitar's most beloved concerto Joaquín Rodrigo; the towering 20th-century figure Benjamin Britten; and the polymath pianist and composer (and author, artist ...) Stephen Hough. Let's also open the tent a little further to welcome in the hugely influential folk-song collector, Cecil Sharp. Any date will, of course, offer many musical birthdays, but that doesn't dent the pleasure of setting aside time to celebrate those marked today. And, indeed, to commemorate too. For Britten's *Hymn to St Cecilia* – setting Auden – I turned to the recording by the



much-missed Stephen Cleobury, a great champion of choral music, who died on this day just one year ago.

I earlier alluded to the awkwardness of a term which (particularly to outsiders) does little to convey the sheer expanse of music we cover, and two things in this issue particularly, and pleasingly, push at the parameters. Firstly, our cover story. If operetta has rarely been granted such prominence in our pages, I hope Richard Bratby's superb survey of this fascinating genre makes merry amends. And secondly, our annual Critics' Choice, in which our reviewers name their favourite album of the past year. Among the picks, we find solo Bach on cello, harp, harpsichord, organ and guitar (a reflection, perhaps, of a year in which so many have sought such music's inward focus?). There are double inclusions for both Hough's poetic Brahms, and the colouristic beauty of Vikingur Ólafsson's Debussy and Rameau. Indeed, from Ockeghem to Ešenvalds, via new discoveries and canonical classics, the list is an eloquent expression of all that our artform offers.

And finally, another nice coincidence is that this year, St Cecilia's Day fell on 'Stir-up Sunday', a day associated with making Christmas puddings, but in fact named after the opening words of the church's Collect for the day. For few things possess the extraordinary emotive power of music in its ability to 'stir up' people to see the world in a clearer and more profound light. It's proved a source of solace and hope for many millions this past difficult year – and helped us through. Whatever form your Christmas takes, all of us at *Gramophone* send you our very best wishes.

**[martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com](mailto:martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com)**

## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I never need very much encouragement to talk about operetta,' says the author of this month's

cover feature **RICHARD BRATBY**. 'It's my contention that we're living through a renaissance of the form. It was a real joy to talk to three champions of this wonderful but misunderstood genre.'



'The chance to interview a pianist about the business of playing Beethoven's Piano Concerto

No 3 was a rare opportunity which, as a pianist (of sorts) myself, I wasn't going to miss,' says **JOHN EVANS**, author of this issue's Musician and the Score. 'Martin Helmchen was admirably open and honest.'



'You have to let yourself get burnt when handling one of the big Beethoven scores – and I feel quite singed,'

admits **PETER QUANTTRILL**, the author of this month's Collection on the *Missa solemnis*. 'Does the piece struggle with belief or submit to it? Did Beethoven even have the answer for himself?'

*Gramophone*, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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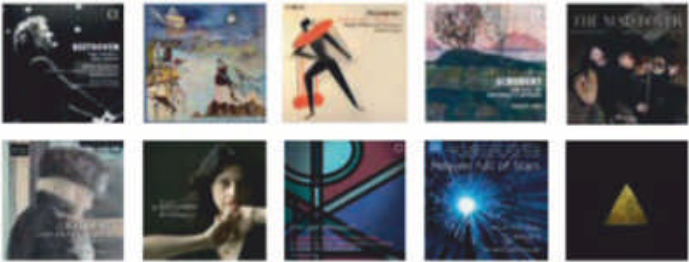
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**Johannes Brahms**  
**Clarinet Sonatas**  
**András Schiff, Jörg Widmann**

András Schiff and Jörg Widmann explore the late clarinet sonatas by Johannes Brahms. The premiere recording of the Intermezzi for piano by Jörg Widmann, dedicated to Schiff, forms a striking and fascinating contrast.

481 9512 CD

**Tigran Mansurian**  
**Con anima**

Celebrating the Armenian composer's 80th birthday, the ensemble led by violinist Movses Pogossian and violist Kim Kashkashian present a cross-section of his recent chamber music works.

481 9522 CD

**Anja Lechner, François Couturier**  
**Lontano**

"German cellist Anja Lechner and French pianist François Couturier, draw from a massive database of internalized European classical traditions. While creating Lontano, their influences range from Bach to Anouar Brahem, to Henri Dutilleux. But the material is merely a launching pad for these artists; now approaching two decades performing together, they've codified their own improv language – a gorgeous interplay that many musicians work a lifetime to find."

Simon Rentner, WBGO

0857705 CD/LP

## ECM NEW SERIES

**Erkki-Sven Tüür**  
**Lost Prayers**

Shimmering sound surfaces and strong contrasts – the Estonian composer's tonal language unfolds all its power of attraction in this chamber music selection – recorded by the Signum Quartet, Tanja Tetzlaff and the Tallinn Trio.

481 9540 CD

**Cyrillus Kreek**  
**The Suspended Harp Of Babel**  
**Vox Clamantis, Jaan-Eik Tulve**

Choral music by Estonian composer Cyrillus Kreek and instrumental interludes with nyckelharpa and kannel.

"The singing breathes with a collective, gentle inevitability. (...) The final impression is abiding solace for these distracted times."

Paul Riley, BBC Music Magazine,  
Choral Choice of the Month

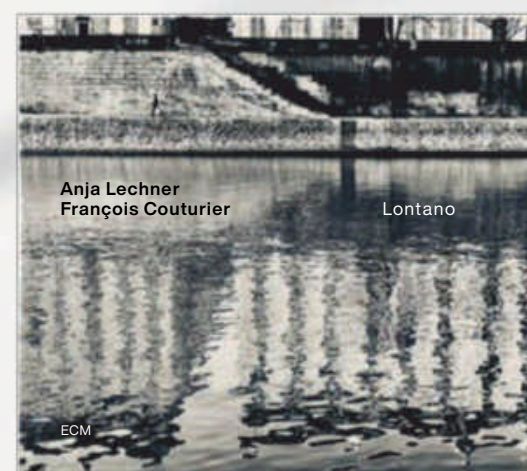
"Beautifully crafted.. really atmospheric."

Andrew McGregor, BBC Radio 3

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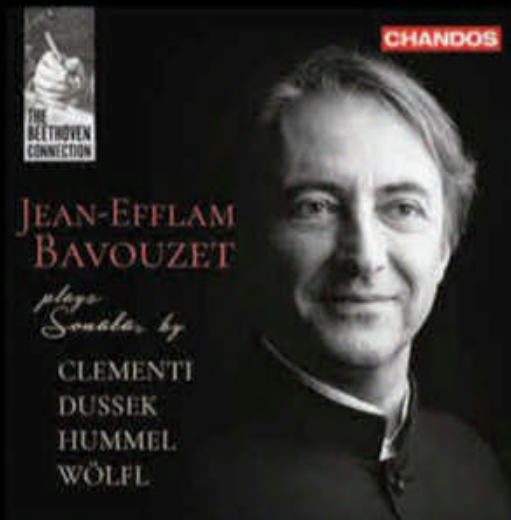
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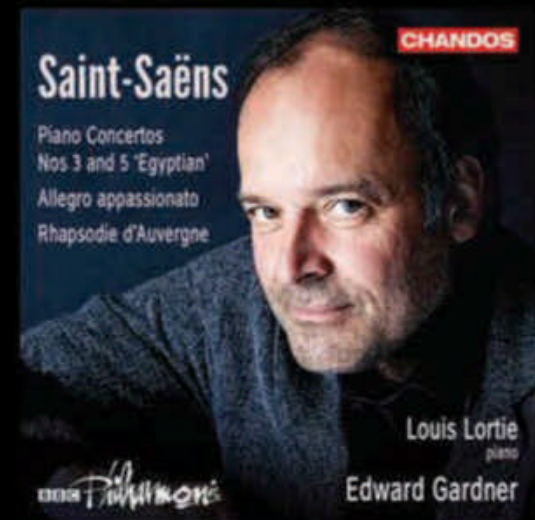
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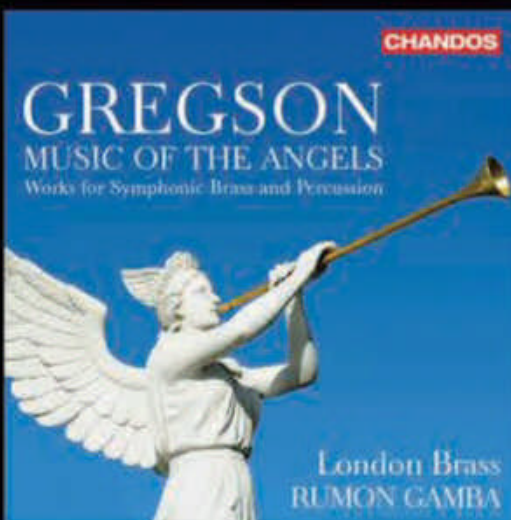
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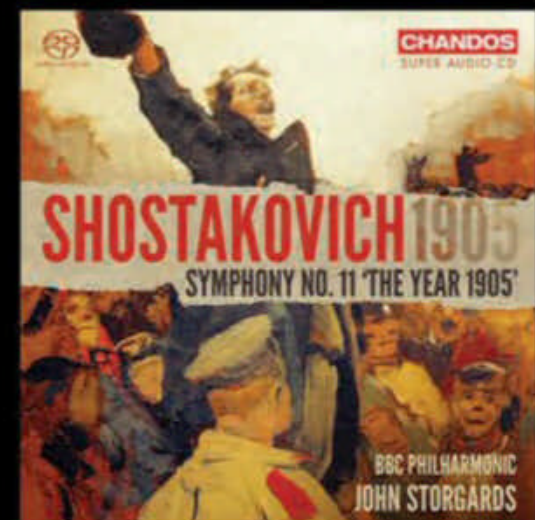
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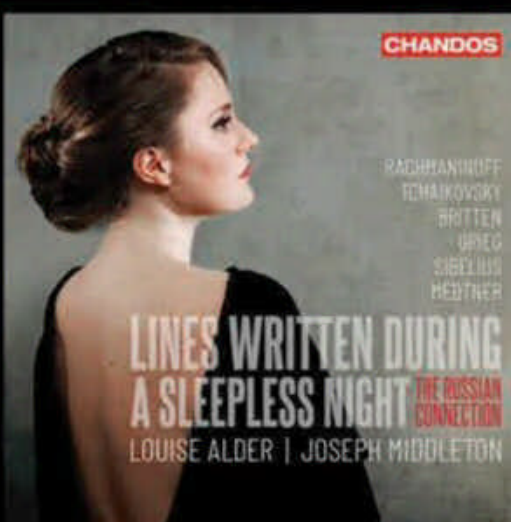
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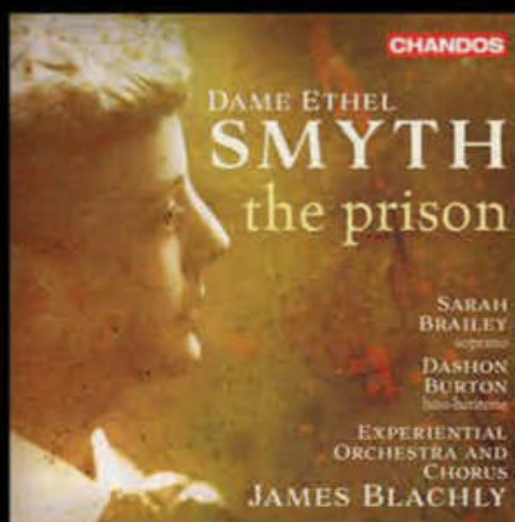
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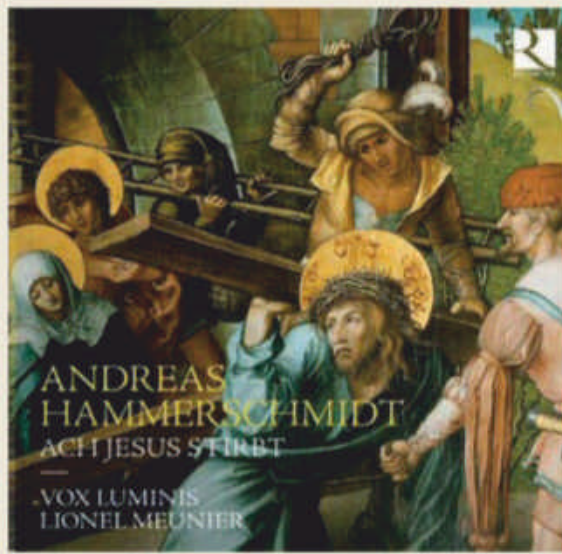


# GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

**Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews**



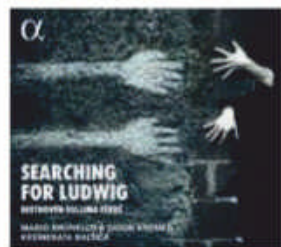
RECORDING OF THE MONTH



## HAMMERSCHMIDT

'Ach Jesus stirbt'  
Vox Luminis; Clematis /  
Lionel Meunier  
Ricercar  
► **FABRICE FITCH'S  
REVIEW IS ON  
PAGE 48**

From Passion through to festivities, this is a truly compelling choral album: Vox Luminis's contributions both as individuals and an ensemble feel exquisite and heartfelt.



**BEETHOVEN.  
FERRÉ. SOLLIMA**  
'Searching for Ludwig'  
Kremerata Baltica /  
Gidon Kremer *vn*  
Mario Brunello *vc*

Alpha

An intriguing and stirring Beethoven album to conclude the anniversary year – two quartets performed by string orchestra.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



**CLYNE** Mythologies  
BBC Symphony  
Orchestra /  
Marin Alsop et al  
Avie  
Anna Clyne's

imaginative orchestral language, rich in melodic flights and enticing details, shines through in these five works spanning 15 years of creativity.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



**VAUGHAN WILLIAMS**  
Symphony No 5  
BBC Symphony  
Orchestra /  
Martyn Brabbins  
Hyperion

A performance of RVW's Fifth of glowing orchestral richness and elegance, and a fascinating Bunyan-based coupling.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



**'TO ROMAN  
TOTENBERG'**  
Nathan Meltzer *vn*  
Rohan De Silva *pf*  
Champs Hill  
A chance to hear

exactly why we made Nathan Meltzer our One to Watch last issue – and also a chance to hear the 1734 Stradivarius once owned by the album's dedicate, Roman Totenberg.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



**JS BACH. KURTÁG**  
'Solo II'  
Tabea Zimmermann *va*  
Myrios  
Beautiful Bach  
playing from

Tabea Zimmermann, an effortless fluidity of line wrapping around the listener, paired with the expressive soundworld of Kurtág's miniatures.

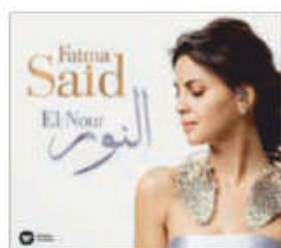
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



**SHEPPARD**  
Media vita  
Choir of New College  
Oxford /  
Robert Quinney  
Linn

Beautiful singing – impassioned, radiant and gloriously sculpted – from New College Oxford, in this wonderful programme of Sheppard's music.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



**'EL NOUR'**  
Fatma Said *sop*  
Warner Classics  
A splendid debut  
from Egyptian  
soprano Fatma Said  
offers a truly cross-

cultural journey embracing songs from France, Spain and Egypt and beyond, all performed with beauty and zest.

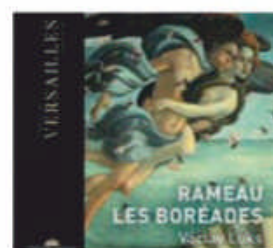
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 88**



**BOISMORTIER** Les  
voyages de l'Amour  
Sols; Purcell Choir;  
Orfeo Orchestra /  
György Vashegyi  
Glossa

'Plenty to beguile', as reviewer Richard Wigmore perfectly puts it – another triumphant operatic rarity recording courtesy of György Vashegyi.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



**RAMEAU**  
Les Boréades  
Sols; Collegium 1704 /  
Václav Luks  
Château de Versailles  
Spectacles

Rameau's last opera receives a sparkling performance, soloists singing with drama, and Václav Luks driving proceedings along with a lovely sense of pace.

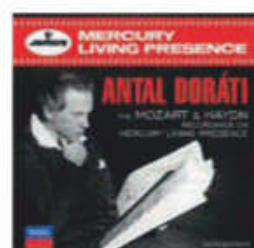
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 96**



**DVD/BLU-RAY**  
**MESSAGER** Fortunio  
Sols; Champs-Élysées Orchestra / Louis Langrée  
Naxos

Another operatic rarity this month – this time from Paris's Opéra Comique – which offers us a welcome dose of, as critic Mark Pullinger suggests, 'gentle, escapist charm'.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**



**REISSUE/ARCHIVE**  
**HAYDN. MOZART**  
'Recordings on Mercury Living Presence'  
Various orchs / Antal Dorati  
Decca Eloquence

A number of Dorati-conducted symphonies receiving their first Decca reissue on CD – and in excellent transfers too – courtesy of the ever-impressive Eloquence label.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 106**



# FOR THE RECORD

## Stile Antico triple Decca deal

Stile Antico, the *Gramophone* Award-winning vocal ensemble, is joining forces with Decca Classics for three recordings celebrating the forthcoming major anniversaries of three Renaissance masters.

The first in the series will explore the music of Josquin des Prez, to tie in with the 500th anniversary of the composer's death next year. Called 'The Golden Renaissance: Josquin des Prez', and centred around the composer's *Missa Pange lingua*, the album is released on January 29. Subsequent releases – to be recorded in Dolby Atmos sound – will mark the 400th anniversary of the death of William Byrd (2023) and the 500th anniversary of the birth of Palestrina (2025).

Founded 15 years ago, Stile Antico has built up a substantial and acclaimed catalogue of albums on the Harmonia Mundi label. One recent release was a superb recording of Victoria's *Tenebrae Responsories* – an Editor's Choice in May 2018 – about which Edward Breen wrote: 'This has to be Stile Antico's best album to date: it's certainly their most gripping and, as ever with this ensemble, the vocal sound is sumptuous throughout.'



Stile Antico: Decca deal to mark three Renaissance master anniversaries

## Cummings to head up AAM



The Academy of Ancient Music has appointed Laurence Cummings as Music Director from the 2021/22 season. The acclaimed British conductor and harpsichordist, whose name crops up regularly in our pages, is familiar to any follower of early or Baroque music.

The past couple of years alone has seen releases of Handel's *Rodrigo* ('dramatically compelling'), *Saul* and the *Brookes Passion* ('unerring judgment of tempos, solemn yet dramatic pacing, articulation, shaping and textures'). All were released on the Accent label, and were recorded from the Göttingen International Handel Festival over which Cummings presides as Artistic Director.

'I'm delighted to join with the Academy of Ancient Music to develop what the orchestra already has,' said Cummings, who spoke of his aim 'to explore this wonderful repertoire that we all love with such a passion, and hopefully to reveal something new and fresh to the modern ear'. He succeeds Richard Egarr as head of the period-instrument ensemble, who has held the post since 2006.

## Dego joins Chandos from DG

Violinist Francesca Dego has signed an exclusive recording deal with Chandos Records. The Italian's first project for the label will be a recording on Paganini's violin 'Il Cannone' (an instrument rarely heard on record) of Rossini and Schnittke, due for release in February. Subsequent albums will include a recording of Mozart concertos with Sir Roger Norrington and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Dego previously recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, performing repertoire including Paganini and Wolf-Ferrari; of her performance of the latter's Violin Concerto, Jeremy Nicholas wrote: 'Dego's sweet-toned advocacy shows the work in the best possible light.' In January last year she released an album called 'Suite italienne'.



She joins a roster of acclaimed artists associated with the label including conductors John Wilson and Edward Gardner, pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and the Doric Quartet.

## HarrisonParrott 'live' platform

HarrisonParrott, the music management company, has created an online platform for hosting classical performances. Called Virtual Circle, it aims to offer 'a concert look and feel', so much so that, unlike many digital concert platforms, the performance will only be available to watch live (or, if it's a delayed broadcast, for the length of the concert), and not for catch-up or archive viewing. It will give artists opportunities to interact with audiences, allow them to host workshops, masterclasses and interviews, and offer a range of ticketing options as well as in-platform promotional and commercial opportunities such as album sales and virtual CD signings.

The service, which is produced in partnership with eMusic Live, launches on December 8 with a concert by the Oslo Philharmonic marking the 155th anniversary of the birth of Sibelius. Future planned concerts will come from artists including the pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard (December 17), the Manchester Camerata and Echo Collective.



# Covid can't stop Alpha opera

Though the pandemic has made live opera a somewhat infrequent event, *Gramophone's* Label of the Year, Alpha Classics, has succeeded in recording two productions under studio conditions



Alpha: two opera studio albums during the pandemic

at a time when performances before an audience were impossible.

Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* was recorded by the Opéra National de Bordeaux under Pierre Dumoussaud with a cast headed by Stanislas de Barbeyrac as Pelléas and Chiara Skerath – a recent *Gramophone* One to Watch – as Mélisande. At the Opéra de Rouen Normandie, Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* was recorded under Ben Glassberg with Nicky Spence as Tito and Skerath as Servilia.

Alpha's Didier Martin commented that 'by a strange quirk of fate, the current crisis has meant that we were able to undertake two recordings under conditions that in normal times would have been impossible. Both companies have assembled wonderful casts, each led by an up-and-coming conductor.'

Both operas are scheduled for release in the autumn of 2021.

## ONE TO WATCH

### James Newby Baritone

For those who follow these things, the British baritone James Newby has been a rising star for a few years now, thanks in no small part to a string of prestigious awards. In 2015, while still studying at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London, he won the Richard Tauber Prize (for the best interpretation of a Schubert song) and Third Prize overall at the Wigmore Hall/Kohn International Song Competition; in 2016, the year he made his debut at the BBC Proms in Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music* with conductor Sakari Oramo, he won the Kathleen Ferrier Award; in 2017 he won the Trinity Gold Medal and Glyndebourne's John Christie Award, and became a Rising Star of the Enlightenment, the OAE's two-year scheme for emerging singers. Perhaps inevitably, he subsequently became a BBC New Generation Artist in 2018.



Newby has now made his debut solo recording, for BIS Records. Called 'I wonder as I wander' and issued on January 8 (and reviewed next month), this album builds on the central building blocks of Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* and the baritone's beloved Schubert to encompass songs by Mahler and Britten which trace an underlying theme of the physical and spiritual vagabond – a displacement familiar to performing musicians. Combining honeyed vibrancy with poised lyricism, Newby's baritone is a flexible instrument of compelling tonal beauty. We're all excited to see where his relationship with BIS takes him next. Plans are afoot to record an album of English songs although, given the disruptions caused to so many projects this year, there is no firm timescale. Watch this space.

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## GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

*String trio*

**David Thresher** surveys a form where, not for the first time, Mozart led the way

**T**he problem with having only three string instruments is that the sound is naturally less 'complete' than a string quartet. The challenge for composers is to maintain ample tone with, as it were, one bow tied behind their back.

Trios with a pair of violins and cello had lingered from the Baroque period, a hangover from the trio sonata from which the harmony-filling keyboard instrument was dropped. Haydn wrote a string of such works early on, and in one of them he had his second fiddle switch to viola, but he didn't pursue this type of trio any further. It was, as so often, down to Mozart not only to launch the Classical string trio but also to provide its enduring masterpiece. His *Divertimento*, K563, is a magisterial six-movement work of his full maturity, written for friends (himself on viola), overflowing with melodic invention and drenched in rich string tone. Diverting it assuredly is, although there is nothing light about this music.

The young Beethoven leant on and reacted to Mozart, first in the six-movement *String Trio*, Op 3 (from around the same time as his Op 1 *Piano Trios*), and then, in more genial mode, the seven-movement *Serenade*, Op 8, in which one of the now-standard pair of minuets is replaced by a polacca. By the end of the 1790s he had completed a set of three four-movement *String Trios*, Op 9, in which the voice is fully his own, his debts to teacher Haydn and



The Brussels String Trio – an early 20th-century pencil drawing by Hilda Wiener

idol Mozart acknowledged and paid off in full. Thereafter Schubert flirted with the form during his teens, finally producing a full four-movement trio (D581) on the cusp of his compositional maturity.

Odd examples pop up later in the 19th century but the form wasn't really taken seriously again until the Second Viennese School got their hands on it, with both Schoenberg and Webern revelling in the clarity it brought to their serial textures. Hindemith got in on the act with a pair of neoclassical works, while Dohnányi composed a *Serenade* that has held on to its popularity.

The 20th century's most notable work for violin, viola and cello, however, is not a chamber work but a concerto for those same three instruments. Michael Tippett's late-1970s *Triple Concerto* combines his preoccupations with the mystical and numinous alongside his abiding adoration of Beethoven in an absorbing work that is likely to remain unique in the repertoire. Go back almost exactly 200 years, though, and you'll find the sketched exposition of a concerto for exactly the same combination of instruments – by Mozart. **G**

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS*Nathan Meltzer* on his 1734 'Ames, Totenberg' Stradivarius violin

“Roman Totenberg was a famous violinist and pedagogue who, for 20 years, played on what was then called the 'Ames Stradivarius' of 1734. In 1980, he had played a recital and after the concert had locked the violin in his office while he went to the front of the hall to meet people and talk to students. While he was chatting, someone snuck into his office with an empty case, took the violin, and ran off with it.

For 30 years the violin wasn't heard – you can't steal a Strad and go out in public with it because, as with any fine art really, it's extremely recognisable, to luthiers and to musicians. It was occasionally played privately, but it was also just neglected, because it couldn't be taken anywhere for repair. So it was just left to decay for almost 30 years, locked away in this guy's house. When the thief died in 2011 he left it to his ex-wife; she sent it over to a luthier who recognised that this was the famous stolen Totenberg Stradivarius. Unfortunately that was a couple of years after Professor Totenberg had died so he never saw the violin again, but it was returned to his three daughters who were overjoyed. The instrument spent three years in restoration. Repairers had to clean superglue out of it – they did an amazing job with it. The Totenberg sisters set up a Foundation, and the violin is on



loan to me through that. I'm incredibly grateful. I've been playing on it for two years and it's been amazing.

After it was stolen, Professor Totenberg famously said that he had been performing on it for 20 years but had only just figured out how to play it, because with these instruments it's a symbiotic relationship – it takes a long time to get used to how the instrument plays, to learn how to coax the best sounds out of it. I've been noticing that the instrument fundamentally changes depending on who is playing it. Even these past two years I've been astounded by how much it's changed, and how much my playing has changed because of it.

It's a really big instrument – a little bit longer, a little bit bigger, a little bit wider than normal. (A lot of the

later Strads are bigger than the earlier ones, and this is no exception.) So the first thing I noticed was the comfort – I'm a tall, lanky guy, and violins tend to feel small in my hands, but this one, from the get-go, felt really comfortable. A lot of the process has been learning how to utilise my natural weight in a way that I'd had to restrict on other violins. It really loves and requires that athleticism in the playing, that kind of hardness of approach, which is right up my alley.”

*Nathan Meltzer's album 'To Roman Totenberg' is reviewed on page 69*



# FROM WHERE I SIT

John Bridcut's film reveals the true Haitink – both the maestro and the man, believes Edward Seckerson




Like many, I was thoroughly absorbed by John Bridcut's touching film *Bernard Haitink, The Enigmatic Maestro*. I wasn't entirely sure about the title, though, because what you see is surely what you get with Haitink: a decent, compassionate and painfully shy maestro whose legendary status in this so often ego-driven profession is almost a contradiction in terms. I think Bridcut was right to highlight Bruckner in Haitink's pantheon of favourite composers. Spiritually, temperamentally, they have so much in common: patience, humanity and an all-embracing belief. In so many (or few) words, Haitink expressed the extent to which he had grown into this music, how far he had come with it from the fire-brand and, yes, more interventionist conductor he was in his youth.

The paradox is that however much a conductor wants to believe that music is an entirely communal pursuit, a shared experience (and ultimately, of course, it is), you do not rise to the very top of the maestro tree without a high degree of self-belief in the musical choices you're making and asking others to share. Every conductor has a view, and to suggest that a conductor like Haitink simply gets out of the way and lets the music speak for itself is a mistaken one.

I've never shared the enthusiasm for Haitink's 'view' of Mahler or Shostakovich, for instance. I've always felt that, temperamentally, he was unsuited to both. And whether or not you share his 'objective' view of Mahler, the reality is that Haitink has always chosen to minimise the discomfiting extremes in which Mahler's scores abound. That's not my opinion, it's there in black and white. Why would Mahler write *schnell* ('fast') so emphatically over the final bars of the first movement of the Third Symphony if what he really wanted was for the tempo to remain the same throughout those last pages? Just one of countless examples of what you might describe as 'neutering' that I took away from Haitink's rapturously received 2016 BBC Proms performance of the piece.

There was a very revealing moment in Bridcut's film when Haitink suggested that in the autumn of his life his inclination was to give Mahler a wide berth. 'It's all so loud,' he said, or words to that effect. And it brought to mind an off-the-cuff reaction he gave to Roger Norrington's first 'period' Beethoven symphony recordings which I overheard during a break in one of his recording sessions. I remembering him screwing up his face and shaking his head disapprovingly: 'All trumpets and drums!'

But then Haitink would be the first to acknowledge, even gently mock, his own 'conservatism'. His open disapproval of Richard Jones's infamous staging of Wagner's *Ring* during Haitink's tenure at the Royal Opera House (highlighted in the film) was nonetheless tempered with respect for its intellectual rigour – and when I interviewed Haitink for the Wagner Society shortly after its opening he made a point of telling the audience that we had not gathered to ridicule the production but to address the questions it posed and, more importantly, to talk Wagner. When I gently asked him what his production might be like if he were to stage the *Ring*, he thought for a moment and said: 'Very boring.' Modesty and self-deprecation – so typical of the man. 



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# ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

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Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

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**Home** Konzert und Kongresshalle, Bamberg

**Principal Conductor** Jakub Hrůša

**First Principal Conductor** Joseph Keilberth

There is a rather beautiful logic in the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra's latest recording project: pairing Brahms symphonies with those by Dvořák. Before it styled itself as characteristically Bavarian, this orchestra was a literal fusion of the German and the Czech. It was founded in 1946 as the 'Bamberg Musicians' Orchestra' by a group of instrumentalists displaced by the war, mostly German-speaking former members of the German Philharmonic of Prague.

This first generation of players gave the orchestra its dark, rounded, velvety (and notably loud) sound, nurtured in Bruckner and Brahms by Joseph Keilberth and Eugen Jochum. The town of Bamberg took the orchestra to its heart, the washy acoustic of the cloistered church, Dominikanerbau, where it gave concerts for nearly 50 years, probably leading to the co-opting of that sound as something distinctly Bavarian (the 'böhmischer Klang').

If that seemed more of a branding exercise (there are plenty of orchestras more deeply rooted in Bavarian soil than this one), it suited all parties. In 1993, moving into its new concert hall, the orchestra was given the honorary title Bayerische Staatsphilharmonie ('Bavarian State Philharmonic') and used by benevolent governments as an ambassadorial tool, giving hearty, meat-and-potatoes performances of Austro-German repertoire.

But the shift to a drier acoustic, a generational change and a Principal Conductor from outside Germany would all conspire to reframe that sound, if not redefine it. The Englishman Jonathan Nott was appointed in 2000 and according to the then Concertmaster Peter Rosenberg (as quoted in Tom Service's 2012 book *Music as Alchemy*), the focus subsequently became



'virtuosity, transparency and flexibility'. The loud, dark, distinctive 'Klang' was still there, just no longer slathered over everything from Mozart to Debussy – while some of the more distinctive, Czech-style wind and brass playing receded after a fresh intake of players.

Nott left Bamberg having made a Mahler cycle much admired by *Gramophone* not just for its occasional revelations but also for its sensitivity and depth of feeling. He had also taken the orchestra back on to the world stage and galvanised its support back home: around 10 per cent of Bamberg's 70,000 inhabitants are not just regular visitors to the orchestra's concerts but committed subscribers.

And still, many among the orchestra's younger generations still hear the Bamberg sound. The orchestra is once again using it as a marketing tool, notably in a recent ad campaign fronted by the new Principal Conductor responsible for that meeting of Brahms and Dvořák (as Neil Fisher reported in *Gramophone* in March 2020). He arrived in 2016, the ensemble's long-overdue first conductor from the land of its forefathers: Jakub Hrůša.

**Andrew Mellor**

► Listen to our Bamberg Symphony Orchestra playlist on Apple Music



Behzod Abduraimov joins Alpha's starry roster

## Abduraimov at Alpha

The 30-year-old pianist Behzod Abduraimov has signed to Alpha Classics. Uzbek-born but American-based, Abduraimov burst on to the scene in 2009, when at the age of 18 he won the London International Piano Competition. He signed to Decca, and his early recordings were notable for their quietly refined poetry and non-confrontational style. His most recent recording – Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini* on Sony Classical – is chosen by David Fanning for this year's Critics' Choice (see page 23). Abduraimov's first recording for Alpha is released on January 8 and comprises Debussy's *Children's Corner*, Chopin's Preludes Op 28 and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. It will be reviewed in the next issue of *Gramophone*.

## RPS honours Williams

The Royal Philharmonic Society has bestowed its prestigious Gold Medal on the film music composer John Williams, who adds his name to a list of recipients including Brahms, Elgar, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Britten and Leonard Bernstein. The honour was given at the RPS Awards in November.

## Classical Music online

*Classical Music*, the publication serving the UK's classical music industry and a sister title to *Gramophone*, is relaunching as a digital resource ([classical-music.uk](http://classical-music.uk)). Led by Editor Lucy Thraves it will offer daily news updates, commentary from specialists, and advice and analysis from industry figures.



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## Podcasts

This month on the *Gramophone* Podcast, to mark his new release on Orchid Classics, composer and clarinettist Mark Simpson joins Editor Martin Cullingford to explore the album's captivating – and interlinked – mixture of old and new repertoire. Opening with a wonderfully textured work by Simpson himself, *Geysir*, the album then continues with Mozart's *Gran Partita*.

Another fascinating podcast features Paul Wee who, following his BIS recording of Alkan's *Symphony for Solo Piano* and *Concerto for Solo Piano* (which was shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award), takes on another challenging work of the piano literature: Thalberg's *L'art du chant appliqué au piano*. Reviews Editor Tim Parry talks to the pianist about the recording, Thalberg's piano music in general and how Wee balances his piano-playing with his 'day job'.

Finally, James Jolly speaks to Cyrus Meher-Homji, who founded Eloquence 21 years ago, about how the label came to be and the changes it has seen over its first two decades.

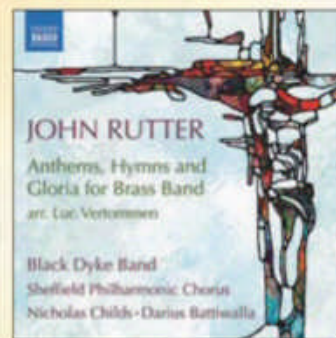


Mark Simpson, star of our recent *Gramophone* Podcast

## FREE! Recordings of the Year 2020 digital magazine

We have produced a special, free digital magazine featuring all of this year's Editor's Choice albums and Recordings of the Month. It's your essential guide to many of the finest classical recordings of 2020 and will be appearing on Exact Editions in early December, available for everyone to read regardless of how you normally access *Gramophone*. Make sure to subscribe to the *Gramophone* newsletter via our website so that we can notify you as soon as it's published.

## NAXOS NEW RELEASES AUTUMN 2020 HIGHLIGHTS

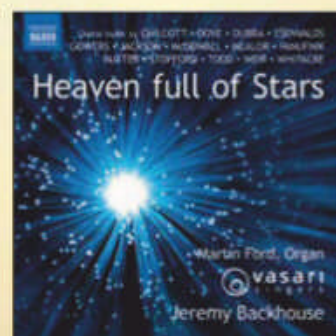


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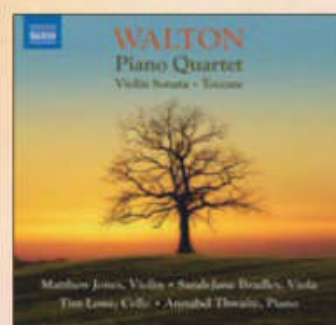


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### HEAVEN FULL OF STARS

*Vasari Singers, Jeremy Backhouse*

An attractive and accessible programme of contemporary choral music, *Heaven full of Stars* celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Vasari Singers. The themes of stars, heaven and celestial light are explored through music by Bob Chilcott, Eric Whitacre, Cecilia McDowall, Gabriel Jackson, Roxanna Panufnik, Eriks Ešenvalds, Judith Weir, John Rutter and many more. 'We hope that this lovely music depicting light in the darkness will prove a musical beacon to all its listeners.' – Jeremy Backhouse



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### WILLIAM WALTON

*Piano Quartet, Violin Sonata, Toccata*  
Matthew Jones, Sarah-Jane Bradley, Tim Lowe, Annabel Thwaite

These four works represent all of Sir William Walton's chamber music involving both violin and piano. They offer a fascinating glimpse of Walton's stylistic journey, from the youthful exuberance of the early *Piano Quartet* and the *Toccata* to the unconventional but masterful *Violin Sonata*, and the *Two Pieces* with their connection to his music for films.

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Dagmar Manzel dazzles in Barrie Kosky's production of *Abraham's Ball im Savoy* at the Komische Oper Berlin in 2013

# MAKING MERRY WITH OPERETTA

In Lehar's 150th anniversary year, **Richard Bratby** discovers that operetta – traditionally considered the poor relation of operatic works – is deceptively difficult to pull off, requiring musicians to dig beneath its polished surface in order to express hidden emotional depths



You probably already know what followed: the scepticism about Lehár's score ('That's not music!' declared the theatre's director Wilhelm Karczag; he offered Lehár 5000 crowns to withdraw it) and the mixed reviews (Karl Kraus pronounced it 'distasteful') after it opened on December 30, 1905. And then the snowballing word-of-mouth success, and the opening of productions in Berlin, London and New York that transformed Léon and Stein's phoned-in gamble into the most successful (and lucrative) property in the history of operetta. A Lehár-mad public could buy Merry Widow cigars, salads, corsets and perfumes. Richard Strauss was jealous; Mahler was a fan. 'We danced together when we got home, and played Lehár's waltz from memory,' remembered Alma Mahler (the couple were 'too highbrow' to purchase the sheet music).

*'Escapism' is the usual accusation – as if art has no business providing a joyous, if temporary, respite from an unhappy reality*

And that's just the start. Arguably (and in the story of operetta, fantasy can be as meaningful as fact), there'd have been no modern musical theatre without Lehár's galvanising effect on Broadway and the West End; no MGM musicals without Mitteleuropean refugees who'd grown up dancing to the waltzes of Lehár and Kálmán; no global music industry without this dazzling proof that the right show could make you very rich indeed. Only the genre's founder, Offenbach, and (in the English-speaking world, though certainly not confined to it) Gilbert and Sullivan come close to Lehár's success. And in his own lifetime, none surpassed Lehár. The historian Richard Traubner, writing in 1983, estimated that *The Merry Widow* had received 250,000 performances worldwide in its first seven decades. In Lehár's 150th anniversary year, it must be inching towards a cool half-million.

But can that really be right? In the UK, barring a couple of *Widows*, little was planned for the Lehár anniversary. These are lean days for operetta – driven from the stage by its descendant, the musical; from the airwaves by pop; and from the collective memory by a whole tangle of prejudices and (often false) assumptions about the form's innate triviality. 'Escapism' is the usual accusation – as if art has no business providing a joyous, if temporary, respite from an unhappy reality. If 2020 has achieved anything positive in the arts, it might have gone some way to correcting that notion. When London's Opera Holland Park managed to salvage something from the wreckage of its season, it began with a socially distanced operetta gala titled *Heart's Delight*. Glyndebourne's sole new production in 2020 was an exuberant, speedily assembled staging of Offenbach's deliriously silly *Mesdames de la Halle* – the first Offenbach ever seen at the Sussex festival.

And it's not as easy as they made it sound. The conductor John Wilson has said that *The Merry Widow* is the single most difficult thing he's ever conducted. John Andrews, who conducted that Holland Park gala, has an operetta CV that runs from Offenbach's *Robinson Crusoe* to what would have been a new staging of *The Merry Widow* this summer; he's also recorded Cellier's *The Mountebanks* and Sullivan's *Haddon Hall* for Dutton. He agrees: 'One of the big difficulties of operetta is trying to keep the bigger structure alive,' he says. 'At the most extreme end, in *The Merry Widow*, there's more dialogue than music, so you've somehow got to keep the dialogue at a level of heightened drama out of which the music can come. It's very,



**T**

he story of modern musical theatre hangs on a single phone call. Victor Léon and Leo Stein were quite clear about the best man to set their new operetta libretto for the Theater an der Wien:

Richard Heuberger, composer of *Der Opernball* (1898). Their enthusiasm lasted until the day in spring 1905 when Heuberger played through his uninspired ideas for Act 1. Lehár – an infantry bandmaster turned aspiring operetta composer – was not the pair's first choice of a replacement. Persuaded to give him a whirl, they sent him a copy of the libretto. That same night, Lehár phoned Léon, and down the line he played the Act 2 duet 'Dummer, dummer Reitersmann' – the first completed number of what would become *Die lustige Witwe* (*The Merry Widow*).

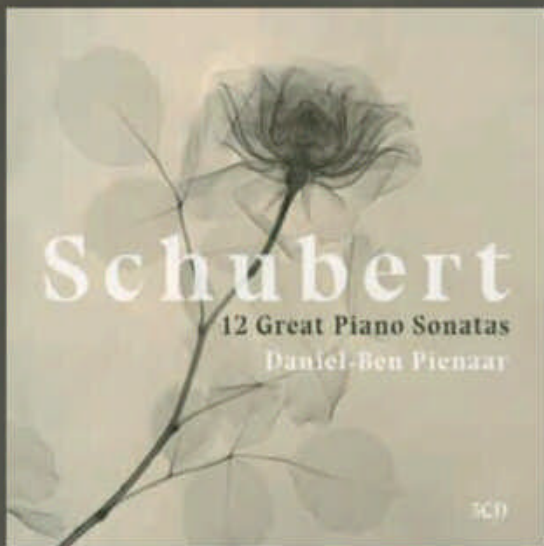




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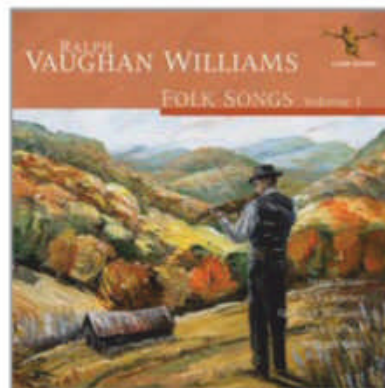
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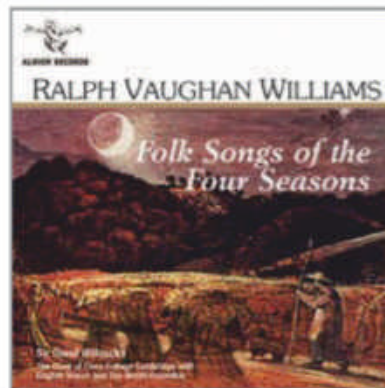
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very difficult to go from a naturalistic delivery of the dialogue into a score as perfumed as *The Merry Widow*. And then you have this issue that it has to sound completely effortless. There's as much rubato as Puccini, but no one's supposed to notice. It's fine for 19th-century grand opera to sound visceral; whereas with operetta, you have to expend all that effort on making sure that no one knows you're working – and delivering it as if it's the easiest thing in the world.'

That's before you even get to the meaning behind it all. 'In operetta, the depth of feeling is always underneath a veneer of sophistication and polish,' says Andrews. 'People don't collapse on the floor or jump off buildings. So all that emotion is somehow expressed without politeness being sacrificed. It's actually got a lot in common with Handel – that Baroque idea, where surface gentility is, in itself, expressing massive emotional depth.'

And then, of course, someone actually has to sing it – and speak it, and act it. 'Operetta calls for the same kind of singer as in opera,' write Anastasia Belina and Derek B Scott, editors of *The Cambridge Companion to Operetta* (2020), before cheekily adding that, 'The only difference is that the singer is also expected to act and dance skilfully.' None of which comes as news to the soprano Soraya Mafi, who sang Teresa on Andrews's recording of *The Mountebanks*. She's currently preparing the title-role in Reynaldo Hahn's delicious *Ciboulette*, but with a repertoire that embraces both Mabel in *The Pirates of Penzance* and Musetta (in ENO's drive-in *La bohème* at Alexandra Palace, London, in September 2020), it's clear that she – like many younger



Lehár (right) and original Widow leads Treumann and Günther

singers – sees operetta and opera as complementary skill sets. 'It's with the spoken dialogue that the difference really shows up,' she says. 'The thing is, when you're doing spoken dialogue, you take control of the timing – the music doesn't dictate it. Comic timing in operetta is so important.'

The physical act of delivering dialogue is a challenge in its own right, 'especially when you're doing it in a bigger theatre', says Mafi. 'I did Ida in *Die Fledermaus* as an undergraduate, and I found that I was struggling. As a soprano, you're singing in a range that isn't your spoken range. So I worked with a speech therapist, because if you've got a lot of dialogue and you're supporting it to the level at which you support your singing, you're going to be exhausted after doing a matinee and an evening show.'

**B**ut all this commitment is worth it: because despite operetta's reduced status in the wider musical world, the central masterpieces of the repertoire are in surprisingly

good health. It's often a question of local perspective. In their central European heartlands, the Viennese standards still get good box-office results: Operabase has recorded that in the 2018-19 season Puccini and Bernstein were the only 20th-century operatic composers whose works received more performances worldwide than *The Merry Widow*. *Die Fledermaus* received more productions than *Aida* or *Il trovatore*, and Kálmán's *Die Csárdásfürstin* outperformed anything by Janáček, Berg or Britten.

In the Gallic tradition, Offenbach's bicentenary in 2019 reaffirmed the indestructible freshness of 'the Mozart of the



Left: John Andrews conducts the Heart's Delight open-air gala in Holland Park, London; right, foreground: soprano Soraya Mafi records *The Mountebanks* for Dutton, 2017





Manzel with Dominik Köninger, *Die Perlen der Cleopatra*, 2016

Champs-Élysées' (I write from experience – it's not often one reviews a 30-disc set of a single composer and comes out thirsty for more). As for Gilbert and Sullivan, a generation has grown up without memories of the old D'Oyly Carte company, and perhaps with fewer prejudices about what these works can be. Playful, inventive new productions of *Patience*, *Ruddigore* and many more are now the norm. I took an opera novice to Cal McCrystal's dazzling 2018 staging of *Iolanthe* at English National Opera and he left convinced that Gilbert's libretto had been updated (it hadn't), so unerringly did the combination of music, words and drama hit the satirical bullseye.

One director who has embraced a very particular operetta tradition is Barrie Kosky. G&S was (and is) a vital presence in his native Australia; but his Hungarian grandmother instilled an early love of the central European classics too: 'I saw Richard Bonyngue conduct Kálmán's *Countess Maritza*, and a dreadful production of *The Merry Widow* with Joan Sutherland in Melbourne. Appalling! Operetta was not Dame Joan's *fach* – we can say that very confidently. But in my childhood, from recordings and anecdotes, I knew there was this thing called operetta, and that it wasn't like Wagner or Mozart or Verdi or Puccini or Janáček. And I loved it.'

Since 2012, as Intendant of the Komische Oper Berlin, Kosky has been rediscovering the jazz operettas of inter-war Germany. Presented with show-stopping theatrical flair, works like Paul Abraham's *Ball im Savoy* and Oscar Straus's *Die Perlen der Cleopatra* have played to capacity houses – as Kosky and his company renew a lost

*'Comedy is a nightmare to direct, and it takes twice as long as an opera by Wagner or Mozart: it's all timing' – Barrie Kosky*

repertoire along with the techniques required to make it work. 'I was inventing a style as I was directing,' he says. 'I mean, I didn't come to *Ball im Savoy* or *La belle Hélène* saying, "This is the style." What you see here in Berlin is a style that has emerged organically out of the people that are doing it. Comedy is a nightmare to direct, and it takes twice as long as a Wagner or a Mozart opera: it's all timing. And it's also casting – you've got to find people who have that really wonderful mixture of intelligence, irony and the erotic. This goes for Lehár, it goes for Kálmán, it goes for Oscar Straus, and it goes for Offenbach. We know that, a lot of the time, the great operetta singers in the '20s and '30s didn't sing the vocal line. They spoke the text, they shouted the text, they half-sung the text, they interjected.

'It's very easy to do it in Berlin, because there's a huge context here. I'm doing it in the theatre where Lehár conducted and premiered *The Land of Smiles* (in 1929). Offenbach conducted his own operettas at the Deutsches Theater. The city has a huge operetta history, and we've tried to find a modern way of doing them, but not by rewriting, because that's cheating. What we do

is exactly like reconstructing a Baroque opera. We may use 70 per cent of the original text, and then improvise and make up 30 per cent, but the stories and the characters and the dialogue are mostly from

the original – because most of the masterpieces are fabulous. And as you know, it's been a spectacular success. You can't get a seat.'

It's also increasingly clear that the standard history of operetta – beginning with the sparkling, satirical 'golden age' of Offenbach, Sullivan and Johann Strauss II, followed by a post-



*Merry Widow* 'silver age' that's essentially a long decline into Ruritanian escapism (that word again) – won't wash any more: if it ever did. What about Lehár's later scores for the Austrian tenor Richard Tauber – shows like *Paganini* (1925), *The Land of Smiles* (*Das Land des Lächelns*) and *Giuditta* (1934), in which he adopts the exotic settings of inter-war cinema to tell stories of disillusion and loss? No champagne finales here. Abraham's *Viktoria und ihr Husar* (1930), a drama of lives torn apart by the First World War and its aftermath, still finds space for chorus lines and red-hot saxes. In *Die Herzogin von Chicago*, Prince Sandor tries to outlaw the Charleston, but Kálmán's sweeping score – complete with jazz band, gypsy ensemble, children's chorus and full orchestra – gives Broadway a run for its money.

If you can't get to Berlin, or to the Operettszínház in Budapest, or to the festivals in Mörbisch and Bad Ischl in Austria and in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, where

rarities are revived and national traditions are celebrated each summer – well, it's never been a better time to collect recordings. Dutton's *Haddon Hall* has come coupled, brilliantly, with two contemporary 30-minute one-acters, recreating the experience of a whole night out at the Savoy Theatre in the early 1890s. The French independent label Bru Zane has given deluxe scholarly treatment to rarities by Offenbach as well as (even more encouraging) Messenger's *Les p'tites Michu*.

Meanwhile, CPO, with its long-running Lehár project (often taken from stagings at Bad Ischl), is one of several labels plugging the gaps in the Austro-German operetta discography. For the first time, scores like Kálmán's *Ein Herbstmanöver*, Heuberger's *Der Opernball*, Fall's *Die Dollarprinzessin* and Künneke's *Herz über Bord* are available, effectively complete, in serviceable modern recordings – though the performance style divides opinions,

*Operetta is a dazzlingly executed high-wire act thriving on the tension between sophistication and pure, uninhibited fun*

especially in the growing academic field of operetta studies. Interpretations can be over-earnest, and recordings routinely cut or omit librettos – unconsciously echoing the way the Third Reich erased the work of so many Jewish operetta creators. For Kosky, the deluxe, grand opera approach to operetta has malignant roots. 'The Nazis Aryanised it – they took the jazz out, they took the sex out, they took all the danger out, they took all the wit out, they reorchestrated it. Then, after the war, opera singers decided that it was nice to have a holiday and make some money by doing an operetta album, and they put the last nail in the coffin. What operetta needs is the same revolution that happened in Baroque music a few decades ago. I mean, listen to the way Tauber sings operetta – so spectacularly good; but listen to

Jonas Kaufmann trying to do the same music and it's a disaster. I love Nicolai Gedda singing French and Italian opera, but his recordings of operetta are catastrophic, like Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's.

I mean, it's like getting Emma Kirkby to sing Wagner.'

Ouch. True, I didn't buy Kaufmann as a latter-day Tauber, but I came to Lehár through Schwarzkopf and I can't be alone in having a guilty soft spot for all those overblown post-war German recordings – after all, for many years they were the only game in town. And operetta, like jazz, has always adapted, taking on the colouring of its cultural surroundings. For every aficionado who winces at an overproduced 1970s studio recording (I've got a *Der Graf von Luxemburg* that's been reorchestrated with accordion and rhythm guitar), there's someone for whom that recording has been a cherished pathway into a happier world. Operetta revivals can be a necessary act of cultural restitution, but they succeed, in the end, because these are fascinating, moving, and infinitely renewable works of art that continue to speak to audiences on all sorts of levels.



Hitting the satirical bullseye: a chorus scene from Cal McCrystal's new production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe* staged at English National Opera in London in 2018





Three little maids (from left): Kitty Whately (Peep-Bo), Soraya Mafi (Yum-Yum) and Sioned Gwen Davies (Pitti-Sing) – 2019 revival of the 1987 *Mikado* by Jonathan Miller

Not the least of these levels is pure entertainment. ‘People are happy to come and have three hours of emotion and spectacle and sex and fun, but with enormous virtuosity,’ says Kosky. ‘That’s one of the words that’s important to the success of operettas, from Offenbach onwards: virtuosity. It’s 10 times harder to direct a good *Orpheus in the Underworld* than it is to direct a good *La traviata*.’

For Mafi, operetta’s significance is intensely personal. ‘My dad passed away on New Year’s Eve, just before I was due to sing some Viennese concerts with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. I turned to the orchestra and said, “Guys, I just lost my dad, and this music brought him so much joy in his toughest times. To me, this is just as important as singing Mozart or Richard Strauss.” It’s really cathartic for me, this kind of music. It speaks to people.’

Or as another operetta fan, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, once put it: ‘Profundity must be hidden. Where? On the surface.’ Like no other musical form, operetta is a dazzlingly executed high-wire act thriving on the tension between words and music, artificiality and sincerity, sophistication and pure, uninhibited fun. For Andrews, that’s both the challenge and the reward: ‘In life, sentimentality and deep emotion sit right next to each other – because at our moments of emotional crisis we cling to familiar forms. And so it’s not false to resort to cliché, it’s actually very true – that when we’re at our weakest and our most vulnerable, Lehár says, “I’m not going to talk to you about all that. I’m going to sing you a folk song about two young lovers.” That’s “Vilja” (from *The Merry Widow*), and it’s everything that you need. And you can also have the dancers, and that great tune, and the audience within the play, and the real audience – and everyone still understands exactly what’s being said.’

Now, in Lehár’s 150th-birthday year, the techniques of operetta, its traditions and the whole culture that created it have changed beyond recognition. But its appeal is as potent – and as tuneful – as ever. **G**

## OPERETTAS ON DISC

Featuring seven pieces to whet your operetta appetite



### Lehár: *Das Land des Lächelns*

Piotr Beczala *ten* Zurich Opera / Fabio Luisi et al  
Accentus DVD Blu-ray (10/18)

From the new school of operetta production, Andreas Homoki’s atmospheric art deco staging brings out the tragic side of Lehár’s cross-cultural love story.



### Heuberger: *Der Opernball*

Gerhard Ernst *bar* Graz Opera / Marius Burkert et al  
CPO (6/18)

This gem from CPO’s ongoing operetta series is the first modern recording of Heuberger’s champagne-fuelled Viennese romcom. Zemlinsky helped with the orchestration.



### Kálmán: *Die Herzogin von Chicago*

Endrik Wottrich *ten* Berlin Rad Chor & SO / Richard Bonynghe et al  
Decca (10/99)

The Viennese tradition declares war on jazz in this sumptuous recording of Kálmán’s 1928 blockbuster – a landmark of historically informed operetta on disc.



### Offenbach: *La Périchole*

Aude Extrême *mez* Bordeaux Nat Op / Marc Minkowski et al  
Bru Zane (10/19)

Irreverence, sparkle and the unmistakable tang of Gallic wit are all there in Minkowski’s pioneering (and stylish) period-instrument account, taken from live performances.



### Sullivan: *Haddon Hall*. Cellier: *Captain Billy*. Ford: *Mr Jericho*

Ed Lyon *ten* Ben McAteer *bar* Henry Waddington *bass-bar*  
BBC Singers & Concert Orch / John Andrews et al  
Dutton (7/20)

Sullivan without Gilbert is a warm-hearted delight, but the real discovery here is a pair of irresistibly hummable one-acters – a forgotten side of the Savoy tradition.



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### Christmas in Puebla

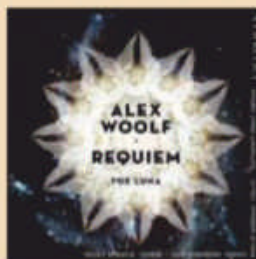
Siglo de Oro / Patrick Allies

The cathedral of the young, thriving city of Puebla de los Ángeles was still a magnificent work in progress when Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla arrived there from Cádiz in the early 1620s as director of music, but its music provision could already rival its European counterparts. Siglo de Oro's programme explores the rich sound-world – a sizeable body of men and boys who not only sang but also played instruments, including guitars, sackbut, dulcian, and simple percussion such as the cajón – that Padilla had at his disposal. Evoking a midnight Mass at Christmastide affords the opportunity to include a number of *villancicos* – energetic, dance-like pieces whose captivating mixture of Mexican, Afro-Hispanic and Portuguese influences would have invigorated even the most sober churchgoer.

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**... a sonic festive feast'**

— Choir & Organ, November/December 2020



DCD34240

### Alex Woolf: Requiem

Nicky Spence *tenor*, Philip Higham *cello*, Iain Burnside *piano*, Vox Luna / Alex Woolf

A major statement by a composer still in his mid-twenties, Alex Woolf's *Requiem*, composed in 2018, combines powerful expressive immediacy with an impressive ability to synthesise the diverse traditions that have grown up around the requiem genre in the past two hundred years. As in Britten's *War Requiem*, the traditional Latin texts are brought into dialogue with modern-day poetry: here, three poems by the Welsh writer Gillian Clarke. Initially these exist in the separate sound-world of a solo tenor – Nicky Spence, fresh from his triumph at the 2020 *BBC Music Magazine* and *Gramophone Awards* – and piano, with a solo cello creating the bridge to the liturgical sphere of choir and organ. Yet ultimately, Clarke's very human concerns focus and inflect Woolf's approach to the religious texts, confirming the work's trajectory from despair into consolation.



DCD34237

### Pelham Humfrey: Sacred Choral Music

The Choir of Her Majesty's Chapel Royal / Joseph McHardy

A protégé of Henry Cooke, first director of the choir of the Chapel Royal after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Pelham Humfrey was part of a generation of musicians who enriched the musical life of their native England with influences drawn from continental Europe. Today the choir sings at St James's Palace, where – joined by a small instrumental ensemble led by Delphian regular Bojan Čičić, with an antiphonal layout inspired by records of the former chapel at Whitehall – this group of ten boy choristers and six adult singers revives the musical and devotional world of its former director, in intimate readings alive with its predecessors' improvisational flair.

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# Critics' Choice 2020

*Our critics each choose a favourite recording from the past 12 months.  
If you're after the perfect gift guide for Christmas, look no further!*

## Tim Ashley

**Respighi** *La bella dormiente nel bosco*  
Sols; Chorus and Orchestra of Teatro Lirico di Cagliari / Donato Renzetti

Naxos 2 110655; NBD00106V (7/20)



In a year so desperately short of magic, the Teatro Lirico di Cagliari's production of Respighi's *Sleeping Beauty* provided it in spades. Exquisitely conducted by Donato Renzetti, it's a gorgeous score, beautifully sung by a fine ensemble cast, while Leo Muscato's witty, inventive staging is quite genuinely enchanting. I loved every second of it.



## Andrew Achenbach

**Vaughan Williams** *Symphony No 5*. Scenes adapted from Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*  
Sols; BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins

Hyperion CDA68325 (12/20)



The latest instalment in Martyn Brabbins's RVW symphony cycle for Hyperion brings as dedicated, articulate and lucid a reading of the great and glorious Fifth as one could hope for. The apt pairing of the 1906 incidental music for *The Pilgrim's Progress* is worth experiencing for the 'Angel's song' alone.

## Mike Ashman

**Wagner** *Götterdämmerung*  
Sols; Chorus and Orchestra of Deutsche Oper am Rhein / Axel Kober

AVI-Music AVI8553507 (A/20)



While regretting the Covid-aborted flood of new *Fidelios* this Beethoven year, I find myself turning to the climax of a new Wagner *Ring* cycle, Deutsche Oper am Rhein's *Götterdämmerung*, imaginatively and quite swiftly led by Axel Kober. No huge stars but genuine ensemble playing, the work as drama not as monument.

## Michelle Assay

**Brahms** *The Final Piano Pieces*  
Stephen Hough *pf*

Hyperion CDA68116 (1/20)



Stephen Hough's profoundly poetic interpretation of Brahms's late piano works is an antidote to the self-indulgent sentimentality that has long dominated accounts of these works: a real palate-cleanser. As appropriate for a Renaissance man like Hough, the release is a multi-sensory pleasure, from the cover to Hough's booklet note to, of course, his sublime musicianship.



## Richard Bratby

### 'Escales'

Sinfonia of London / John Wilson

Chandos CHSA5252 (2/20)



We already knew that John Wilson's Sinfonia of London plays with jaw-dropping virtuosity. But you'd need to go back to the 1950s to hear Chabrier and Ibert

played with such flair – and who knew that Duruflé could write so ravishingly for orchestra? Wilson makes every note, phrase and splash of colour glow with affection and style.

## Alexandra Coghlan

Howells Missa Sabrinensis

Sols; The Bach Choir; BBC Concert Orchestra / David Hill

Hyperion CDA68294 (6/20)



This is an easy pick: a recording that's not just an outstanding performance, but also one that explodes so many myths about 20th-century British choral music: what it

is, what it should be and how we should listen to it. Everything about its operatic intensity, symphonic scope and sheer expressive abandon is thrilling.

## Jed Distler

Mahler Symphonies Nos 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 9.

Das Lied von der Erde

SWR Orchestra Baden-Baden / Hans Rosbaud

SWR mono (8) SWR19099CD (Replay, 11/20)



Even with mono aircheck sound quality and less-than-perfect orchestras, Hans Rosbaud galvanises his musicians to deliver scrupulously detailed,

emotionally spot-on and just plain astounding Mahler interpretations. Such commitment and unerring stylistic instinct contrasts to the fussy Mahlerian micro-managers prevailing today. If you care about Mahler, you need to experience Rosbaud's conducting genius.

## Edward Breen

### 'Passions'

Les Cris de Paris / Geoffroy Jourdain

Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2632 (3/20)



This is one of the best early music concept albums in recent years, a sonic time capsule of Venetian early Baroque that has bewitched me for months. I have found

myself drawn back to 'Passions' countless times, lured by the immersive experience of Lotti's Crucifixus settings rubbing shoulders with secular sinfonias.

## Rob Cowan

Bach Six Solo Cello Suites

Alisa Weilerstein vc

Pentatone (2) PTC5186 751 (7/20)



Alisa Weilerstein's solo Bach for Pentatone does it for me, creating the sensation of visiting a Baroque dance hall with an all-encompassing musician who

understands the meaning of everything she plays, be it the intensity of the Fourth Suite, the balletic grandeur of the Sixth or the tragic demeanour of the Fifth.

## Adrian Edwards

Brahms The Final Piano Pieces

Stephen Hough pf

Hyperion CDA68116 (1/20)



From the exciting Capriccio that opens the Op 116 set to the concluding grand Rhapsodie of Op 119, Stephen Hough is alive to the poetry, passion, sentiment

and emotion that Clara Schumann described on receiving 11 of these late pieces from Brahms in 1892. The full-bodied sound of his Yamaha piano is well suited to these multi-faceted compositions that are more varied in mood than the title 'late' might suggest.

## Liam Cagney

J S Bach Goldberg Variations

Parker Ramsay hp

King's College Cambridge KGS0049 (A/20)



The release I have come back to the most this year is Parker Ramsay's solo harp arrangement of the *Goldberg Variations*. Building on the

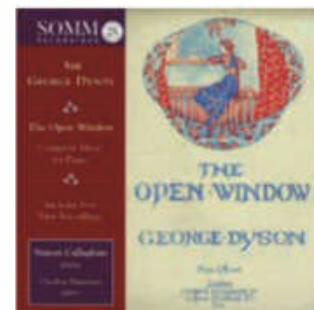
previous harp arrangements of the *Goldbergs*, Ramsay's serene reading, inscribed in the tranquil ambience of King's College Chapel, speaks a vividly contemporary language.

## Jeremy Dibble

Dyson Piano Music

Simon Callaghan, Clodna Shanahan pfs

Somm (2) O622-2 (12/20)



We do not generally associate Sir George Dyson with the piano, but this 101-minute album demonstrates that he was very much in touch with its repertoire, whether

as a pedagogical vehicle for young people (and there is much attractive music here) or with more personal utterances such as the *Three Wartime Epigrams* or the *Four Twilight Preludes*. It is also good to hear the arrangement of the quirky yet voluptuous *Concerto Leggiero* (best known as a piece for strings and piano) in its scoring for two pianos, sympathetically played by Callaghan and Shanahan. Another jewel from Somm!

## David Fanning

Rachmaninov Rhapsody on a Theme

of Paganini. Symphony No 3

Behzod Abduraimov pf

Lucerne SO / James Gaffigan

Sony Classical 19075 98162-2 (5/20)



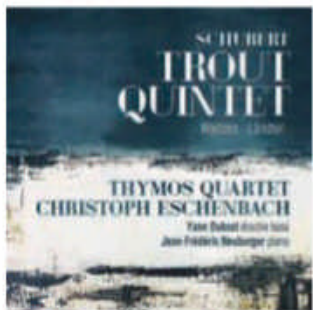
Rachmaninov's own piano – a gift from Steinway in 1934 – here stars in a subtle yet powerful performance of the *Paganini Rhapsody* by Uzbek-born,

American-trained Behzod Abduraimov. The Third Symphony, likewise composed at Rachmaninov's summer mansion in Lucerne, is also beautifully played, and the CD is distinguished by fine essays and a galaxy of photographs – clearly a labour of love.



## Andrew Farach-Colton

**Schubert** Piano Quintet 'Trout', etc  
**Thymos Qt; Yann Dubost db Christoph Eschenbach, Jean-Frédéric Neuburger pfs**  
Avie AV2416 (8/20)



Moments of solace have been hard to come by in such an annus horribilis, so I'm especially grateful for these smiling, tender-hearted performances

(and Olivier Dujour's clever arrangements of German Dances). Eschenbach's playing in the *Trout* Quintet sparkles, and the Thymos Quartet are enchanting throughout. A surprisingly potent musical salve.

## Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

**Bach** St John Passion  
**Collegium Vocale Gent / Philippe Herreweghe**  
PHI ② LPHO31 (3/20)



Two of the finest-ever *St Johns* appeared this year: this, and one from Masaaki Suzuki (who also gave us an award-winning *St Matthew*). By the finest hair,

Herreweghe resonates the longer in the memory. Illuminating pacing, madrigalian nuancing and dignified observation permeate a special ritual around which the emotional world contentedly sits. It's masterful, and with a glorious sound.

## Christian Hoskins

**Sibelius** Symphonies Nos 1 & 3  
**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Owain Arwel Hughes**  
Rubicon RCD1055 (11/20)



My vote was very nearly claimed by Paavo Järvi's electrifying account of Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (8/20), but the draw of

Owain Arwel Hughes's superbly fresh and invigorating performances of Sibelius's First and Third Symphonies has ultimately proven impossible to resist. A wonderfully stimulating and enjoyable release.

## Iain Fenlon

**Cesti** *La Dori*  
**Sols; Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone**  
CPO ② 555 309-2 (11/20)

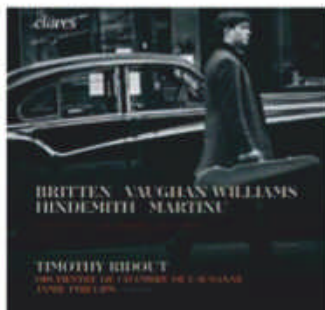


Cesti's *La Dori* contains some of the most unforgettable music - ranging from the poignantly affective to the delightfully comic - to have been written for

the 17th-century Italian stage. Ottavio Dantone and his Accademia Bizantina sympathetically support a cast of committed and experienced singers; instrumentation is imaginatively lush, colourfully enlivening the bare bones of Cesti's score. Altogether a well-paced and at times deeply moving account, which for many will be a revelation.

## Charlotte Gardner

**Britten. Hindemith. Martinů.**  
**Vaughan Williams** Music for Viola and Chamber Orchestra  
**Timothy Ridout va Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne / Jamie Phillips**  
Claves 50-3000 (5/20)



I can't stop listening to this gorgeously engineered first orchestral recording by Timothy Ridout. There's much to admire: the young British viola player's

arrestingly rich, glowing tone, alive with colour and character; his long-lined, singing lyricism; and ravishing partnering from Lausanne CO under Jamie Phillips. All four already-delectable works sound as though they've come home.

## Lindsay Kemp

**'Lamento'**  
**Damien Guillon counterten Café Zimmermann**  
Alpha ALPHA626 (A/20)



In a melancholy year, I found comfort in 'Lamento', Café Zimmermann's exquisitely moving presentation of elegiac music for string ensemble by

the likes of Biber, Schmelzer and JC Bach. Such programmes are far from uncommon, but this one, with added pangs from the countertenor of Damien Guillon, gives the music an accumulative expressive eloquence that has lodged in my consciousness.

## Fabrice Fitch

**Ockeghem** Complete Songs, Vol 1  
**Blue Heron**  
Blue Heron BHCD1010 (1/20)

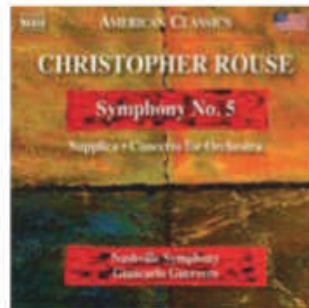


At last, a worthy successor to the Medieval Ensemble of London's complete songs of Ockeghem 35 years ago (full disclosure: I was involved in

editing a few of them). The best performances here more than comfortably supersede it, and some are restored as near as possible to their pristine state: a must-hear.

## David Gutman

**Rouse** Symphony No. 5. Supplica and Concerto for Orchestra  
**Nashville Symphony Orchestra / Giancarlo Guerrero**  
Naxos 8 559852 (10/20)



New music with backbone from a much-missed composer. Christopher Rouse's blasting, percussive tendency had its origins in the rock

music he once taught (innovatively), but his lost Edens recall the mid-20th-century pastoral of a Piston or a Tippett. The appropriately Beethovenian Fifth of 2015, decently served here in its first recording, circles wagons noisily. The elegiac *Supplica* attempts to haul us back from the abyss.

## Philip Kennicott

**JS Bach** Complete Works for Keyboard, Vol 3  
**Benjamin Alard hpd/org**  
Harmonia Mundi ③ HMM90 2457/9 (7/20)



Benjamin Alard's acclaimed traversal of the complete Bach keyboard works continued with Volume 3 this year, another well-received instalment of what

is adding up to a major contribution to our understanding of the composer. Alard is equally adept on the harpsichord and the organ, and uses both instruments, often with surprising and illuminating results, and his interpretations are smart, fleet, well-executed and engaging.



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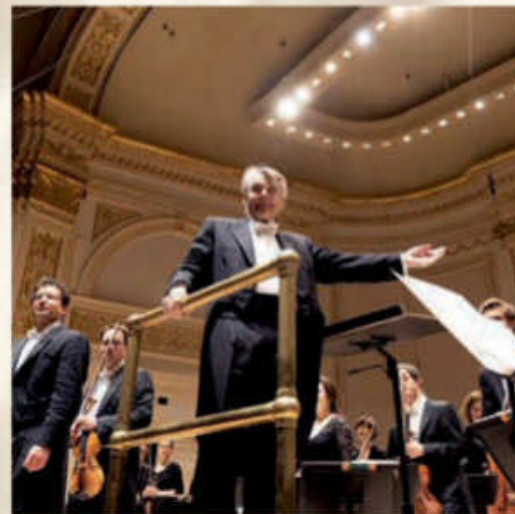
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## Richard Lawrence

**R Strauss** *Die Frau ohne Schatten*  
Sols; Chorus and Orchestra of the Vienna State Opera / Christian Thielemann  
Orfeo ③ C991203 (8/20)



I saw this production in Vienna and, like Hugo Shirley, found it disappointing. But on CD it sounds magnificent. The Kaiserin and Färberin of Camilla

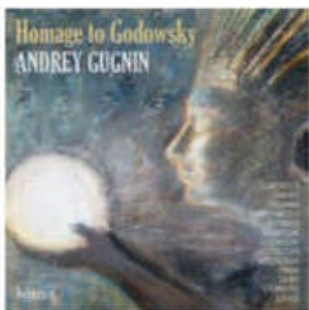
Nylund and Nina Stemme are particularly well characterised, and beautifully sung. Best of all, in this uncut performance, is the sovereign playing of the orchestra under Christian Thielemann.

## Jeremy Nicholas

**'Homage to Godowsky'**

Andrey Gugnin *pf*

Hyperion CDA68310 (5/20)



I'd never normally nominate something I was directly connected with, but the fact remains that 'Homage to Godowsky' (for which I planned the

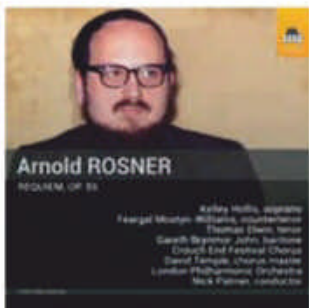
programme and wrote the booklet notes) gave me the most pleasure this year. These works, dedicated to the pianist-composer whose sesquicentenary it was in February, are played with masterful aplomb by Andrey Gugnin.

## Guy Rickards

**Rosner** Requiem

Sols; Crouch End Festival Chorus; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Nick Palmer

Toccata Classics TOCC0545 (A/20)



Peter Eötvös's extraordinary 'stuttering oratorio', *Halleluja* (2/20), John Pickard's chamber works (try *Ghost-train*, 9/20) and Philip

Sawyers's Fourth Symphony (also 9/20) vied for top spot but, relistening to them all, I have to choose Rosner's viscerally exciting Requiem, for its breadth of vision and stunning recording.

## Andrew Mellor

**Ives** Complete Symphonies

Los Angeles Philharmonic / Gustavo Dudamel  
DG 483 9505 (10/20)



Coming late to Charles Ives, I am finding his music absorbing, invigorating and frightening in the extreme. New recordings of the

four symphonies from America's most progressive orchestra on Germany's most traditional label have been one of 2020's rare balms – and proof that the world has always been spinning out of control.

## Mark Pullinger

**'Debussy • Rameau'**

Vikigur Ólafsson *pf*

DG 483 7701 (4/20)



Vikigur Ólafsson's juxtaposition of Rameau and Debussy is a truly inspired 'album-as-playlist' approach to programming. He succeeds in

creating a conversation between the two composers across the centuries that makes for fascinating listening, Ólafsson's sensitive playing drawing out the similarities between their harmonic languages. A highly engaging and much recommended recording.

## Malcolm Riley

**Ešenvalds** 'Translations'

Portland State Chamber Choir / Ethan Sperry

Naxos 8 574124 (5/20)



As the days grow shorter and the curtains are drawn earlier, I am lured back to the Portland State Chamber Choir's ravishing all-Ešenvalds album,

'Translations', mostly for its highly soothing, comforting factor but also for the stunning choral performances under Ethan Sperry. Another Naxos bargain, full of emotional relish.

## Ivan Moody

**Penderecki** *St Luke Passion*

Sols; choirs; Montreal SO / Kent Nagano  
BIS 2287 (9/20)



This deeply moving recording is a poignant reminder of just how powerful a work Penderecki's *St Luke Passion* is. All the performers here, under Kent

Nagano, engage with it with tremendous immediacy, and it retains its ability to shock, and to transmit its message to the contemporary listener. A masterly recording from BIS of a 20th-century masterpiece.

## Peter Quantrill

**'Complete RCA Album Collection'**

Peter Serkin *pf*

RCA (35 discs) 19439 71387-2 (9/20)



For light relief from Beethovenian lucubrations this year, I have turned back, and again, to Peter Serkin. In everything from the *Goldbergs* to Takemitsu – taking

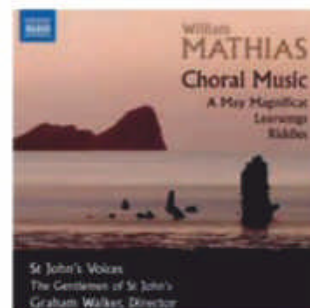
in the *Diabellis* along the way – he illuminates music I should know better. The lucidity of his thought, translated to the keyboard with refreshing directness by his fingers, invites me to meet him halfway. Worlds at one remove from me – Chopin, Webern, Lieberman – are now closer and more enticing thanks to his playing, which doesn't deal in 'style' beyond the voice of the composer.

## Marc Rochester

**Mathias** Choral Music

St John's Voices; The Gentlemen of St John's / Graham Walker

Naxos 8 574162 (4/20)



This year's barrage of grim news got me rooting around for something to cheer the spirits. When I read my description of this eclectic mix of William Mathias's

choral works as 'life-enhancing', and the performances by Graham Walker's St John's singers as a 'hugely entertaining display of dazzling choral singing', I knew I had found the perfect antidote to misery.



## Patrick Rucker

**Beethoven** Piano Concertos No 2 & 5  
**Kristian Bezuidenhout** *fp* Freiburg  
Baroque Orchestra / **Pablo Heras-Casado**  
Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2411 (3/20)

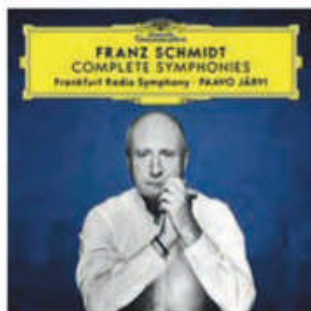


Among my lasting favourites from all this year's Beethoven recordings are these fresh, bold, completely original and stunningly beautiful concertos

by Kristian Bezuidenhout with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra under Pablo Heras-Casado. Conscious consideration of every detail in these brilliant scores yields performances of sumptuous grandeur and complete abandonment to the spirit of the music.

## Hugo Shirley

**Schmidt** Complete Symphonies  
**Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra /**  
**Paavo Järvi**  
DG ③ 483 8336 (A/20)



Of all this year's releases, the one I've been returning to most often is Paavo Järvi's superb survey of Franz Schmidt's four symphonies.

It's difficult to imagine a more persuasive case being made for these fine, serious works than this set of handsome and intelligent – and, above all, moving – live performances from Frankfurt.

## Edward Seckerson

**Shostakovich** Symphony No 11, 'The Year 1905'  
**BBC Philharmonic / John Storgårds**  
Chandos CHSA5278 (6/20)

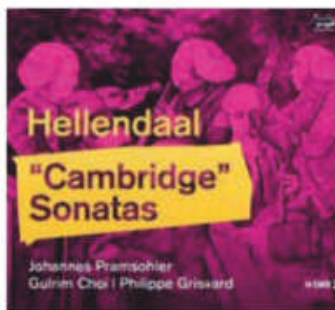


A resounding and searching account of perhaps my favourite Shostakovich symphony where drama and sonic spectacle are so movingly

underpinned by the wordless revolutionary songs at its heart and soul. The reader feedback I have received on this release is testament to its perennial power and that of the performance.

## Pwyl ap Siôn

**Hellendaal** 'Cambridge Sonatas'  
**Johannes Pramsohler** *vn* **Gulrim Choi** *vc*  
**Philippe Grisvard** *hpd*  
Audax ADX13720 (6/20)



Interviewing Johannes Pramsohler about Diderot Ensemble's 'Berlin Album' back in December 2019 opened my eyes

and ears to the rich treasure-trove of lesser-known Baroque music that's out there. The 'Berlin Album' is an absolute cracker, but also worth checking out is this set of six 'Cambridge Sonatas' by Pieter Hellendaal. As Charlotte Gardner noted in her review, a superlative recording in every respect.

## Mark Seow

**Telemann** La Querelleuse  
**The Counterpoints & Friends**  
Etcetera KTC1652 (6/20)



Fresh and joyful playing from The Counterpoints. Solo and chamber music by Telemann are performed with rare rhetorical refinement yet

gentle, unostentatious flair. Their communication is speckled in spontaneity and generous in colours, steeped in musical maturity all the while with Peter-Pan lightness and curiosity. Utter loveliness.

## Harriet Smith

**'Debussy • Rameau'**  
**Víkingur Ólafsson** *pf*  
DG 483 7701 (4/20)



This album featuring two great Frenchmen is a perfect marriage of programming and execution – yet another winner from the *Gramophone* Award-winning

Icelandic pianist Víkingur Ólafsson. To the music of Rameau he brings brilliance and grace, while his Debussy interpretations are lit by myriad shadings and the subtlest of colourings. Plus, as a bonus, we get Ólafsson's inspired arrangement of music from Rameau's last opera *Les Boréades*.

## ... AND FIVE CHOICES BY THE GRAMOPHONE TEAM TOO!

### James Jolly

**Janáček** The Cunning Little Vixen. Sinfonietta  
Sols; LSO Discovery Voices; LSO & Chorus /  
**Sir Simon Rattle**  
LSO Live ② LSO0850D (10/20)



What is it about Janáček's music that makes it so powerful and relevant? Maybe because one minute you are seduced by writing of deep

humanity and tenderness, the next punched in the gut. Rattle has long been a magnificent Janáček interpreter and this live performance, quite superbly cast, finds him and his great orchestra on top form. Totally magical.

### Martin Cullingford

**JS Bach** 'Guitar Works'  
**Sean Shibe** *gtr*  
Delphian DCD34233 (6/20)



A companion throughout a troubled year, these are truly beautiful interpretations by the gifted guitarist Sean Shibe of the most sublime

works in the instrument's repertoire. Rich in colours that seem to emerge from the music's profound heart, they offer an evolving emotional response that stems as much from the attentive listener as the performer – the mark, surely, of a superb and timeless album.

### Sarah Kirkup

**Mahler** Das Lied von der Erde  
**Sols; Berlin RSO / Vladimir Jurowski**  
Pentatone PTC5186 760 (9/20)



I could never listen to Mahler's settings of ancient Chinese poems without visualising Sir Kenneth MacMillan's orientalist-infused

choreography – until now. Thanks to Jurowski's overarching, inclusive vision by which the soloists are 'subsumed into the orchestral sound' (ES), I'm swept away by the music's mysticism, serenity, humour and vigour. And Sarah Connolly has never sounded better.



## David Patrick Stearns

**Rameau** Les Boréades

**Sols; Collegium 1704 / Václav Luks**

Château de Versailles ③ CVS026 (12/20)



Is *Les Boréades* theatre of the mind or theatre of the stage? Collegium 1704 most explores the mind of the aging Rameau, who didn't create any

titanic characters in his final opera but pushed harmonic and orchestration boundaries further than before – underscored by crackling rhythms and arresting colours in this recording. Singers are good to excellent (especially Benedikt Kristjánsson as Calisis), even if, perhaps, the malevolent windy underworld of Act Five is shortchanged.

## Richard Whitehouse

**Winbeck** The Complete Symphonies

**Various orchestra and conductors**

TYXArt ⑤ TXA17091 (3/20)



He may have stayed under the radar outside of his native Germany, but Heinz Winbeck (1946-2019) late on emerged as a symphonist with few equals for

ambition and impact; qualities to the fore in this indispensable set of his five symphonies which is more than ever needed at the present time.

## David Threasher

**Jommelli** Missa pro defunctis. Miserere

**Il Gardellino / Peter Van Heyghen**

Passacaille PAS1076 (7/20)



Jommelli's Requiem was important and influential in its day but is virtually forgotten now. Fortunately, two groups remembered this really rather

touching piece this year, and I hope I'm forgiven for marginally preferring Il Gardellino's austerity over the more operatic Ghislieri ensembles (Arcana, A/20).

## Arnold Whittall

**Schoenberg** Violin Concerto. Verklärte Nacht

**Isabelle Faust vn Sols; Swedish RSO /**

**Daniel Harding**

Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2341 (4/20)



As Schoenberg's 'defiant response to a period of exceptional stress and strain', his Violin Concerto isn't exactly a soothing antidote to a fraught year. This recording, like that of *Verklärte Nacht*, is forceful yet inspiring, both works turbulent but ultimately affirmative – easily the best versions of both available at the moment.



## David Vickers

**Purcell** The Fairy Queen

**Gabrieli Consort & Players / Paul McCreesh**

Signum ② SIGCD615 (6/20)



A bumper harvest of Baroque music in 2020 yielded exceptional interpretations of Stradella, Charpentier, Vivaldi, Rameau, Bach and Handel

(alas, Monteverdi and Schütz were self-isolating), but nothing fired my enthusiasm more than the Gabrieli Consort & Players' reappraisal of Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* – a blissful marriage of musicological inquisitiveness and artistic creativity.



## Richard Wigmore

**Brahms** Lieder

**Sophie Rennert mez Graham Johnson pf**

Hyperion CDJ33130 (11/20)



Brahms, who loved the mezzo-soprano voice, would surely have relished the pure, glowing tones of the young Sophie Rennert. Partnered by the ever-

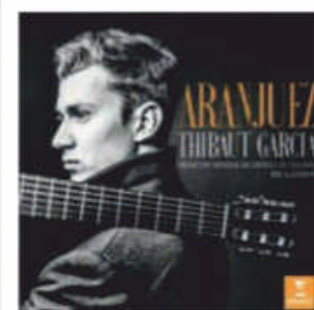
discerning Graham Johnson, Rennert vividly characterises Brahms's mother-daughter dialogues, catches the heightened passions of the *Zigeunerlieder* and sings the viola songs with musing inwardness. A superb finale to another revelatory Hyperion song edition.

## William Yeoman

**Rodrigo** Concierto de Aranjuez, etc

**Thibaut Garcia gtr Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse / Ben Glassberg**

Erato 9029 52357-1 (A/20)



Such is the *Concierto de Aranjuez's* near-universal appeal and number of diverse interpretations that I thought I'd heard it all. What else was

there to say? Quite a lot, it seems, as the talented young guitarist Thibaut Garcia demonstrates here. Rarely has this old warhorse sounded like the dancing stallion it is.



## Tim Parry

**'The Art of Rosa Tamarkina'**

**Rosa Tamarkina pf**

Scribendum ③ SC819 (Replay, 4/20)



A student of Goldenweiser, Rosa Tamarkina won Second Prize at the 1937 Chopin Competition at the age of 16, had a shortlived marriage

to Emil Gilels during the war and died of cancer in 1950 at the age of 30. Memories of her playing left an aura at the Moscow Conservatory for years after her death. This set reveals a temperament and personality sadly curtailed before they truly had the chance to shine.

## James McCarthy

**Britten** Peter Grimes

**Sols; Bergen PO / Edward Gardner**

Chandos ② CHSA5250 (10/20)



I was fortunate to have witnessed Stuart Skelton's astonishing performance, vocally and physically, as Grimes at ENO back in 2009. So it's great

to have my memory of the stature of that night confirmed here by the Bergen PO and Edward Gardner. Gardner explores a thrilling dynamic range, which producer (Brian Pidgeon) and engineers (Jonathan Cooper and Gunnar Herleif Nilsen) have worked wonders to capture.





Embracing Christmas: Andrew Nethsingha and the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, celebrate the joys of communal singing on their second 'Advent Live' album

# *All I want for Christmas*

Andrew Mellor gears up for another festive season with a clutch of this year's Christmas music, from cathedral, chapel and college choirs to Jonas Kaufmann in a Christmas jumper

**I**n this time of social distancing, I hope to remind listeners of the sheer joy of being part of communal hymn-singing,' writes Andrew Nethsingha in the booklet for **Advent Live, Vol 2**, which harvests 2008, 2018 and 2019 performances from the Chapel of St John's College, Cambridge. The nonsense of sterile, congregation-bereft accounts of communal carols recorded off-season in empty churches has been a consistent feature of this round-up for the five seasons I've been writing it. Here is the perfect antidote.

The chapel organ roars its introductions to *Hark, the glad sound!* and *Lo! he comes with clouds descending*, a decision I had taken to be creative: the blazing wonder of the Nativity. But Nethsingha apologises for it in the same booklet essay, claiming it a 'less than ideal' necessity when his chapel and ante-chapel are packed to the rafters. I'm not so sure. Here is the embrace that 2020 – and the majority of records like this one – has been lacking.

'Advent Live, Vol 2' is more besides. It is a real album, the mystery and expectation of Advent coursing through



a repertoire that never stoops below this ensemble's judicious idea of what constitutes high-quality music, whatever the century. There is unhackneyed Telemann, Wolf, Goldschmidt, Britten and some poised works, new to me, by McCabe, Milner and Manz. Cecilia McDowall's *A Prayer to St John the Baptist* brilliantly unifies otherwise autonomous organ and choir. Judith Bingham's introduction to *Hark, the glad sound!* is like a modernist narthex to an ancient cathedral. The qualities of the choir hardly need repeating. It sounds like a string quartet flexing as much as an organ breathing, with no room for show or antiquated 'look at us' habits.

*'Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a classical vocal ensemble rigidly doo-wopping its way through arrangements'*

From a church packed with actual people to a dry studio in LA in which Chanticleer have only themselves for company. At first I thought I'd received the wrong edit of **Chanticleer Sings Christmas**, so tight and arid is the recorded sound from Skywalker Studios. Beyond that, we get a dangerously wide-ranging journey from the polyphonic to the popular with everything in between, including a specialist line in Hispanic carols. There are some thrilling rarities, Jacob Regnart's *Ave regina coelorum* and Pierre de Manchicourt's *Reges terrae* to name just two from the 1500s. But the sterile, office-like sound drains atmosphere from it all, from the polyphony to the traditional Canadian, Spanish and American carols. *Gaudete* sounds like a disciplinary.

What might Chanticleer's sure-footed performance of Byrd's *Ecce virgo* have sounded like in Buckfast Abbey? The special acoustic of this neo-Gothic Benedictine church in Devon is the third instrument in **Ave Rex Angelorum** from the Choir of Keble College, Oxford (the second being its new Ruffati organ).

Keble's 'Journey from Christ the King to Epiphany' masterminded by its outgoing boss Matthew Martin has a particular sound, shaped by that acoustic but also by Roman Catholicism – a seam established in the opening track, Martin Baker's *Christus vincit*, festooned with the gleaming sound of that organ.

Where the way needs smoothing, Martin steps in to contribute his own unobtrusive plainsong-derived works, including a deft fusion of *O come, O come Emmanuel* with the first of the Great 'O' antiphons that rears up in anticipation of Christ's coming. It is music of the acoustic and of the place, with the faintest smell of incense but no flouncing about, and a strong sense of expectation. After new discoveries (for me) by Richard Rodney Bennett and Edward Higginbottom, the album ends with Tavener's furious *Ave rex angelorum* – another workout for the organ and a piece that needs vocal presence, confidence and tonal quality. It gets them from the Keble choir, precise but warm and nuanced with a first-rate soprano group, a credit to Martin's work on it. In sound and concept, a winner.

After five years as a chorister at Buckfast I went to school in Clifton, Bristol, having my first organ

lesson on the neo-Baroque Rieger instrument of Clifton Cathedral in 1997 – the year **Gaudete! Carols and Organ Music from Clifton Cathedral** was recorded and first issued. Woven around a sometimes unsteady performance of Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* are some distinctive treats, all of which involve that organ: a front-footed performance of 'Alleluya' from William Mathias's *Ave Rex*, possibly the finest rendition of John Gardner's easily deflated *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* I have heard (in any configuration), and best of all, a handful of Bach chorale preludes under the fingers and feet of Ian Ball. A mixed bag whose best bits are very good indeed.

The big news for West Country organ nerds in 1997 was the inauguration of a new Klais instrument just 14 miles down the A4 from Clifton in Bath Abbey. It plays a central role in another album emblazoned with the G-word, **Gaudete! The Choir of Bath Abbey**, recorded in January this year and yes, without a congregation: hymn-carols such as *O come all ye faithful* sound underpowered despite the fulsome top line provided by the combined boys and girls of the Abbey Choirs, best heard in the descant to *Once in royal David's city*. The recording is most notable for Huw Williams's salute to his former Hereford Cathedral colleague, the great Roy Massey, including Massey's arrangements of the Ukrainian carol *Long the night* and his setting, with strident but austere organ, of *Adam lay ybounden*. The best showcase for the Klais is Mack Wilberg's arrangement of *Ding dong! merrily on high*, played with relish by assistant organist Shean Bowers.

At Winchester College, Onyx Brass have been added to the mix in a mission to add some festive gleam to standard carol service fare, but the arrangements on **A Winter's Night** are sickly and thin; a few tracks in and you can soon spot the cymbal swooshes and inward-stepping modulations coming a mile off. The huge brass preamble to *In dulci jubilo* undermines the entry of what is a small, contained choral sound. I have heard the Winchester Quiristers sound less stiff and more confident than this and there is little in the programme that stands out.



Opera's Mr Darcy: Jonas Kaufmann announces the time of year with his fun Christmas album





Like the Winchester Quiristers, the Choral Scholars of University College Dublin are unique – a relatively new group of collegiate singers who trade a chapel for an intriguing commercial instinct. **Be All Merry** is a slick album of new, largely unrecognisable settings of old carols woven through with the sound of Gaelic folk song, much of it from the fiddle of the Irish Chamber Orchestra's concertmaster. It provides that one thing we badly need from Christmas albums – something different that's still consistent and festive – and only occasionally edges into processed cheese despite every track being suitable for a TV chat show's play-out. If you can take a degree of Gaelic mistiness there is plenty to enjoy. The jagged arrangement of the *Carol of the Bells* by conductor Desmond Earley caught my ear, sung by a choir very well trained with an idea of its own sound. Two folk songs end the album with timelessness and that binding togetherness Nethsingha was talking about; how exactly will *Auld lang syne* go down this New Year's Eve?





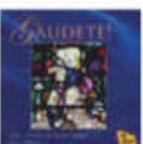

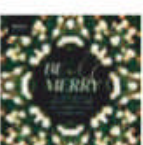



Yes, it's been a tough and disorientating year for many of us but come hither, good folk, for Jonas Kaufmann has a message for one and all: **It's Christmas!** And there can be few better ways to cast off the dark shadows of 2020 than to arm yourself with an album by opera's Mr Darcy recorded mostly in 2019.

The booklet photography tells you what to expect: Kaufmann in his Christmas sweater, leaning by the fireplace, filling stockings and relaxing in his armchair (curiously, a modernist Arne Jacobsen Egg Chair in brown leather – surely a reference to the centenary of Germany's handing half of Schleswig-Holstein back to Denmark in 1920). *It's Christmas!* is a two-disc cavalcade of Lutheran chorales, German folk songs and Christmas standards with plenteous *lustiges tralalalalas* and *klinglelingelinges* along the way, and with boys' choir and big-band guests. The raw qualities of Kaufmann's voice are best heard in the folk songs, where he sounds most like a wide-eyed Lohengrin. But fear not, he is ready to characterise elsewhere, playing the mischievous uncle in *Morgen, Kinder, wird's was geben*, the Stentorian pastor in *Vom Himmel hoch* and the matinee idol in a frankly brilliant 'White Christmas'.

Of course, he can't help but croon: *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* has too many rounded corners to sound solemn or sincere, the fast and loose *Adeste fideles* might have come from Bing Crosby on an off-day and the curious mid-Atlantic accent in *Hark! the herald angels sing* is more Des O'Connor than Gore Vidal. But it's a decent potato-peeling listen and only really derails at the

## THE CHRISTMAS LIST

Your guide to the festive season's recordings

- |   |  |
|---|--|
|    | <b>Advent Live, Vol 2</b><br><b>Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Andrew Nethsingha</b><br>Signum © SIGCD661   |
|    | <b>Chanticleer Sings Christmas</b><br><b>Chanticleer</b><br>Warner Classics © 9029 52288-8                           |
|    | <b>Ave Rex Angelorum</b><br><b>Choir of Keble College, Oxford / Matthew Martin</b><br>CRD © CRD3537                  |
|    | <b>Gaudete! Clifton</b><br><b>Ian Ball; Clifton Cathedral Choir / David Ogden</b><br>Hoxa © HS970802                 |
|   | <b>Gaudete! Bath</b><br><b>Choir of Bath Abbey / Huw Williams</b><br>Regent © REGCD555                               |
|  | <b>A Winter's Night</b><br><b>Winchester College Chapel Choir; Onyx Brass / Howard Ionascu</b><br>Signum © SIGCD646  |
|  | <b>Be All Merry</b><br><b>Choral Scholars of UCD; Irish CO / Desmond Earley</b><br>Signum © SIGCD643                 |
|  | <b>It's Christmas!</b><br><b>Jonas Kaufmann et al</b><br>Sony Classical © (2 discs for the price of 1) 19439 78676-2 |
|  | <b>White Christmas</b><br><b>Calmus Ensemble</b><br>Carus © CARUS83 511  |
|  | <b>Christmas in Europe</b><br><b>Balthasar-Neumann Choir / Thomas Hengelbrock</b><br>DHM © 19439 81399-2             |

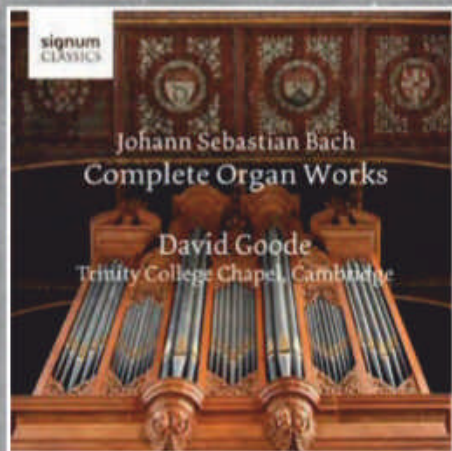
last, in track 42 of 42 – a bad karaoke take on Mariah Carey's 'All I want for Christmas' laid over a stiff-backed arrangement ('trained' covers of this don't come any better than that from the choir of King's College, Cambridge's back rows on 'Twelve Days of Christmas', 12/16).

Otherwise, hats off to *It's Christmas!* for not taking itself too seriously. The 11-paragraph, self-penned booklet note in which each paragraph begins 'When I think of Christmas ...' surely has its tongue in its cheek. Like the music, you'll enjoy it far more after a glass of glühwein.

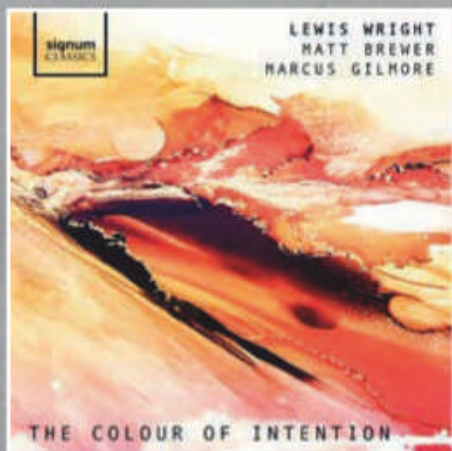
Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a classical vocal ensemble putting its fastidious technique to good use by rigidly doo-wopping its way through arrangements of well-known songs and carols in a bid to prove itself worthy of family entertainment. More often than not, they throw in some 16th-century polyphony as if it were the most natural transition in the world. To be fair to Calmus, Leipzig's five-voice answer to Voces8, **White Christmas** is filled with consistently excellent singing and some strangely successful experiments. The vocal arrangements of Bach chorale preludes lift off the page precisely because they are taken so seriously. I'm not so sure about the schmaltzed take on *Les anges dans nos campagnes* and the hamming-up of *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen*. Then out of nowhere we get the *Kyrie* from a polyphonic Mass by Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer in which Calmus sound like Cinquecento. That piece, and Reger's *Schlaf, mein Kindelein* that precedes it, could really use a non-studio acoustic even if this one's a cut above Chanticleer's.

Calmus's programme takes in carols from four corners of the Continent but **Christmas in Europe** from Thomas Hengelbrock and his Balthasar-Neumann Choir goes a step further, delving into 'the most disparate corners of Europe' in a programme that travels from France to Scandinavia, Russia, Bohemia, Germany, Catalonia, the Netherlands and England and stays in each territory for four or five tracks, long enough to make the point. This is an earnest album and the performances match it: the singing can lack glow but takes stylistic implications seriously, nowhere more so than in a highly idiosyncratic performance of the traditional Spanish carol *E la don don, Verges Maria*. Unsurprisingly, it's at its best in northern European numbers (Niels Gade's *Barn Jesus i en krybbe lå* appears here as well as on the Calmus album) and finds solemnity for Bruckner's *Virga Jesse*, which wraps things up. No jazz hands or brass fanfares here – just a touching surrogate for all the European connectivity lost in 2020. **G**





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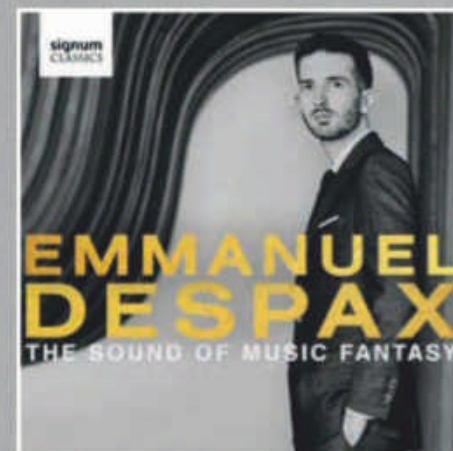
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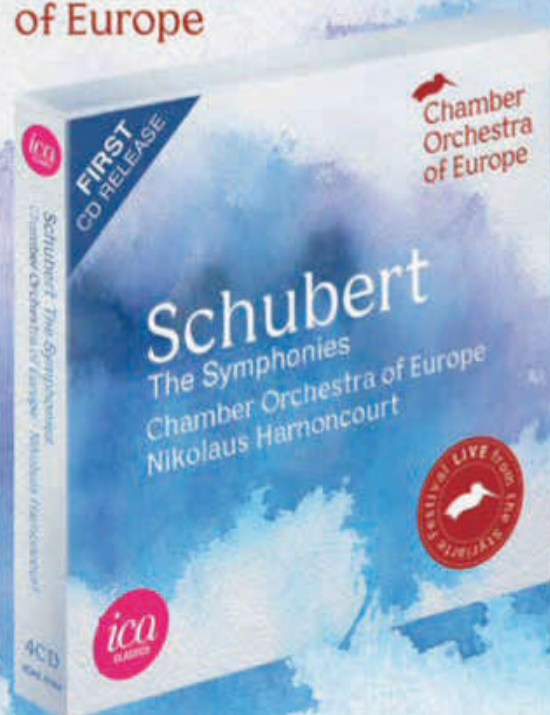
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"I will be  
thankful as  
long as I  
live for all  
the great  
things we  
did together"

Nikolaus Harnoncourt  
on his relationship  
with the Chamber  
Orchestra of Europe

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# MUSIC COMPETITIONS GUIDE

With the majority of events now being streamed, anyone can experience the thrill of music competitions – whether or not you're competing (or social-distancing)



Mezzo-soprano Eszter Balogh, winner of the 2019 Handel Singing Competition

## UK GUIDE

### St Albans International Organ Festival Competitions

**NEXT COMPETITION** July 5-17, 2021

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** March 19, 2021

Part of the St Albans International Festival and under the artistic direction of David Titterington, these competitions are open to organists of all nationalities born after July 17, 1988. There's a choice between entering either the interpretation or improvisation categories, or both. Organs used include the Harris & Harris organ in St Alban's Cathedral, the Robert Jennings Bach 2000 Organ built for Gardiner's Bach Cantata pilgrimage in 2001, and the Richard Bridge organ in Christ Church Spitalfields. A highlight for 2021 is a new work commissioned from Roxanna Panufnik for the interpretation category. Beyond cash prizes, the interpretation winner also receives representation by Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists in the US, plus a solo recording. [organfestival.com/competitions](http://organfestival.com/competitions)

### Bampton Classical Opera Young Singers' Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION** Autumn 2021

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** See website

Launched in 2013, this Oxford-based

biennial competition is aimed at identifying the finest emerging young opera singers currently working in the UK. Previous winners include mezzo-soprano Anna Starushkevych (2013) and soprano Galina Averina (2015).

[bamptonopera.org](http://bamptonopera.org)

### BBC Cardiff Singer of the World

**NEXT COMPETITION** June 12-19, 2021

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** Passed

Time and time again, this major biennial competition has proved to be a major career stepping stone for its winners. Open to singers from all over the world, it has no application fee and pays singers' expenses for the live auditions. Those who make it through then have the chance to participate in masterclasses with distinguished judges and also to take part in live performances with BBC NOW and WNO's orchestra. Plus, not only are these broadcast across BBC television, radio and online networks, but they're also available internationally via the BBC iPlayer. The prizes range from £2500 to £20,000, and also include significant performance opportunities for the winners.

[bbc.co.uk/cardiffsinger](http://bbc.co.uk/cardiffsinger)

### BBC Young Musician

**NEXT COMPETITION** 2021 for the 2020 finals; 2022

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** See website

For young, UK-based musicians, this is the one with serious career-launching potential, demonstrated by former laureates such as Decca artists Nicola Benedetti, Benjamin Grosvenor, Jess Gillam and Sheku Kanneh-Mason. Open to string, percussion, woodwind, brass and keyboard players under the age of 18, the biennial competition was won hands down in 2018 by 16-year-old pianist Lauren Zhang. Although the 2020 edition got as far as crowning the category winners, Covid-19 then delayed the 2020 semifinal and final. The good news is that the BBC has confirmed that these rounds will be broadcast in the new year, so keep checking the website for further details, and also for information on how to apply for the 2022 edition.

[bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00bb3wt](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00bb3wt)

### Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**February 27 - March 1, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** Passed

The stakes are high for the three young European Union-based conductors – plus those from the UK, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein – who make it through to the finals of this (normally) biennial competition run by the LSO and hosted by LSO St Luke's and the Barbican Centre. In addition to £15,000, the winner has the chance to become LSO Assistant Conductor for up to one year – and if you need comprehensive proof of its winners having serious talent, 2018 was won by German conductor Felix Mildenberger, who has just recently stepped down from assisting Emmanuel Krivine at the Orchestre National de France; while 2014 winner Elim Chan currently holds conducting posts with Antwerp

Symphony Orchestra and the RSNO. On the 2021 judging panel are Ivor Bolton, Danielle De Niese, Sian Edwards, Rachel Gough, James MacMillan and Vassily Sinaisky. [lso.co.uk/lso-discovery/donatella-flick-lso-conducting-competition](http://lso.co.uk/lso-discovery/donatella-flick-lso-conducting-competition)

### Handel Singing Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**February 11 - March 23, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** January 4, 2021

This major international Baroque vocal competition (past finalists include Iestyn Davies, Ruby Hughes, Lucy Crowe and Sophie Junker) is for singers aged between 23 and 34. It celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2021, after a 2020 edition which attracted a record 187 applicants from 32 countries worldwide. The final at St George's Hanover Square is accompanied by the London Handel Orchestra under Laurence Cummings and is open to the public as part of the annual London Handel Festival. Prizes include a First of £5000 and a Second of £2000; all the finalists are invited back for future performances at the festival.

[london-handel-festival.com/handel-singing-competition](http://london-handel-festival.com/handel-singing-competition)

### Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION** June 17-26, 2021

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** February 8, 2021

This historic competition for pianists aged between 16 and 30 has just switched to taking place biennially rather than annually. This year marks the beginning of a new partnership with Steinway & Sons for the concerto finals at the White Rock Theatre with the RPO. Furthermore, the semifinals will for the first time be with a chamber orchestra, meaning that all 12 semifinalists get the opportunity to play with an orchestra. A concerto engagement with the RPO then forms part of the First-Prize package awarded by the panel (chaired by RCM Head of Keyboard Vanessa Latache), along with £15,000.

[hastingsinternationalpiano.org](http://hastingsinternationalpiano.org)



### Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship Fund Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION April 20 & 23, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE February 1, 2021**

This annual competition hosted by London's Wigmore Hall is open to singers of all nationalities who have completed at least one year of continuous higher-level study in the UK or Republic of Ireland at a recognised conservatoire or music school, and who are currently resident in that territory. One former prizewinner includes none other than soprano Natalya Romaniw, *Gramophone's* 2020 Young Artist of the Year. Also up for grabs is the Help Musicians Accompanist's Prize (with an application deadline of March 1), whose past winners include James Baillieu and Joseph Middleton. Following on from March auditions, the semifinals and finals take place before a public audience. Prizes range from £500 to £12,500. [ferrierawards.org.uk](http://ferrierawards.org.uk)

### Leeds International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**September 8-18, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Leeds relaunched itself to great acclaim in 2018 under the artistic direction of BBC New Generation Artists founder Adam Gatehouse and pianist Paul Lewis, bringing a breath of fresh air to the competitions world with its multi-disciplinary jury and career-boosting prizes such as a debut recording on Warner Classics. Plans for 2021 include Imogen Cooper chairing a high-profile jury (of which Alfred Brendel is a member), plus a new partnership with the RLPO, who will play with the finalists under their Principal Guest Conductor Andrew Manze. All rounds will be filmed and streamed globally on medici.tv. [leedspiano.com](http://leedspiano.com)

### London International Festival of Early Music - Young Ensemble Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION Autumn 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Open to ensembles of all nationalities with two or more players whose average age is under 30, this biennial competition run by LIFEM takes place in Blackheath, southeast London. Repertoire

needs to be pre-1800, but there's also the potential for playing a contemporary work written for period instruments. Details for 2022 are still to come but, for 2020 (a virtual event, pre-recorded then streamed), the winner – chosen by a jury including soprano Lucy Crowe and violinist Margaret Faultless – received cash and was offered a recital at the 2021 LIFEM. [lifem.org/pages/young-ensemble-competition](http://lifem.org/pages/young-ensemble-competition)

### London Mozart Players' Mozart Memorial Prize

**NEXT COMPETITION 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Launched in 1968, laid to rest in 1982, then resurrected in 2019, this competition helped launch the careers of pianists such as Imogen Cooper and Stephen Kovacevich. Today, its winners are chosen from participants in the Kent International Piano Courses, open to pianists of all ages in three concurrent courses, the advanced course being for emerging pianists from conservatoires and similar backgrounds. First Prize for 2021 is a year's association with the LMP and mentoring from pianist and LMP conductor Howard Shelley. [kipc.co.uk/register](http://kipc.co.uk/register)

### RNCM James Mottram International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**November 29 - December 4, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Covid has pushed back the 2020 edition of this major biennial event to 2021, including its application deadline, meaning there's still time to enter. Run by the Royal Northern College of Music and offering an all-round learning experience for pianists aged under 30 from all over the world, the competition complements its onstage contest with a series of masterclasses by a distinguished international jury, and offers a First Prize of £10,000. The finer details for 2021 weren't available as we went to press, but what we can tell you is that the finals in the RNCM Concert Hall will be accompanied by a full orchestra, and that in 2018 that orchestra was the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Robert Spano. [rncm.ac.uk/jmipc-info](http://rncm.ac.uk/jmipc-info)

### Scottish International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION See website**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Founded in 1986, this Glasgow-based triennial competition is one of the few major international piano competitions in the UK, and is open to pianists of all nationalities aged between 18 and 30. Previous winners include Can Cakmur, Jonathan Fournel, Oxana Schevchenko and Tom Poster. The next edition should have taken place in September 2020, but as a result of the pandemic was postponed. Organisers are waiting for the pandemic to subside before setting a new date, so keep your eyes peeled on the website and look out for announcements on Twitter. [scottishinternationalpiano.com](http://scottishinternationalpiano.com)

### Wigmore Hall/Bollinger International Song Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**September 4-9, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Celebrating the art of the song recital and hailing the Lied's place at the heart of the genre, this biennial competition is open to singers and pianists of all nationalities, aged 33 or under, who are keen to embark on significant recital careers. The 2019 edition was won by bass-baritone Mikhail Timoshenko. The semifinal and final of the 2021 competition will be live-streamed on Wigmore Hall's website. [wigmore-hall.org.uk/song-competition](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk/song-competition)

### Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION April 13-18, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Under the auspices of Wigmore Hall since 2010, this respected triennial competition began life in 1979 as the London International String Quartet Competition, when it was won by the Tákacs Quartet, no less. Open to quartets whose members are under 35, its repertoire requirements span the entire string quartet tradition, from Classical to the present day; the latter includes, for 2021, a 2018 work by Sally Beamish. The international jury, chaired by Wigmore Hall Director John Gilhooly, includes a member of

the Doric Quartet and the leader of the BBC Scottish SO. Winners are given the opportunity to access a total of £23,000 along with major career development prizes. Both the semifinal and final in 2021 will be live-streamed on Wigmore Hall's website.

[wigmore-hall.org.uk/competitions](http://wigmore-hall.org.uk/competitions)

### Windsor Festival International String Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION September 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

In light of the current pandemic, the next event has moved from March to September. Windsor has a good track record for attracting, and choosing, interesting players, perhaps due to the meaningful prizes on offer: a concerto appearance with the Philharmonia Orchestra, a solo recording opportunity with Champs Hill Records, and a fine contemporary bow from Bishop Instruments & Bows. New for 2021 is an additional chamber round, making it three live rounds in Windsor. Streaming plans weren't available as we went to press, but it's definitely worth checking online nearer the time. [windsorfestival.com/international-string-competition](http://windsorfestival.com/international-string-competition)

### York Early Music International Young Artists Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION July 13-16, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Based at York's National Centre for Early Music, this biennial period-performance competition takes place as part of the York Early Music Festival and invites applications from instrumental and vocal ensembles of three or more musicians whose average age is 32 or under. It's a covetable bunch of prizes for any internationally ambitious ensemble, too. First Prize is a CD recording with Linn Records – well worth pursuing when you consider that the 2017 winners, Barocco Tout, achieved a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice for their 2019 album of Henri-Jacques de Croes. Other prizes are to be announced, including a paid concert at the 2023 York Early Music Festival. The closing date for applications is in January 2022 (keep checking online for the date). [yorkcomp.ncem.co.uk](http://yorkcomp.ncem.co.uk)



# EUROPE GUIDE



Czech pianist Lukáš Vondráček, winner of the 2016 Queen Elisabeth Competition

## International Aeolus Competition for Wind Instruments

### NEXT COMPETITION

**September 13-19, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE April 30, 2021**

Based in Düsseldorf and open to all nationalities under 28, this competition for woodwind and brass players rotates disciplines each year; for 2021, it's bassoon, flute and oboe. Prizes range from €10,000 to €20,000, of which €3,000 comes in the form of a scholarship to be used for concert performances. The Düsseldorfer Symphoniker accompany the finals, and viewers worldwide can catch the prizewinners' concert streamed on the competition's website.

[aeoluswettbewerb.de/en](http://aeoluswettbewerb.de/en)

## Géza Anda International Piano Competition

### NEXT COMPETITION

**May 27 - June 5, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**January 31, 2021**

Established in 1978 by the widow of the Swiss-Hungarian pianist Géza Anda, this triennial Zurich- and Winterthur-based competition is open to pianists born after May 27, 1989, and gives finalists the chance to perform with the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra. 2021 is Anda's birth centenary year, thus there's an emphasis on Anda's own preferred repertoire. The starry jury, presided over by Nelson Freire, will award

prizes ranging from CHF20,000 to CHF40,000.

[geza-anda.ch](http://geza-anda.ch)

## ARD International Music Competition

### NEXT COMPETITION

**August 30 - September 17, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE March 31, 2021**

Based in Munich, this is Germany's largest classical music competition, with a starry list of previous winners including Jessye Norman and Mitsuko Uchida. Quatuor Ébène describe how, when they won it in 2004, their concert engagements exploded overnight. The cancelled 2020 edition for flute, trombone, string quartet and piano is now postponed until 2022 (with more flexibility on age requirements), while for 2021 the categories are voice, violin, horn and piano duo. The various prizes include a top one of €10,000 for the solo instrument categories, and €12,000 for the piano duo. The streaming offerings are generous, too – you can watch the semifinals, finals and concerts live on the competition website.

[br.de/ard-music-competition/index.html](http://br.de/ard-music-competition/index.html)

## Princess Astrid International Music Competition

### NEXT COMPETITION

**November 15-18, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE June 1, 2021**

Established in 1953, this major biennial competition hosted by the

Trondheim Symphony Orchestra and Opera rotates between violin and conducting. The 2021 edition presents the deferred 2020 violin competition, with the age limit extended to below 31. First Prize complements NOK160,000 in cash with a solo engagement with the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra and Opera, and a recital at Bergen's Trolldhaugen. Any streaming plans will appear online in due course.

[tso.no/competition](http://tso.no/competition)

## International Bach Competition Leipzig

**NEXT COMPETITION July 18-28, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

This biennial competition is open to over-16s who are experienced in performing in a historically informed style and who were born after July 25, 1987. The 2021 edition presents the deferred 2020 edition for organ (with finalists getting to perform on the Bach Organ), voice, and cello and/or Baroque cello, overseen by three prestigious juries. Beyond cash prizes, winners are offered concert engagements and a recording on the GENUIN label.

[bachwettbewerb-leipzig.de/en/bach-competition/bach-competition-20202021](http://bachwettbewerb-leipzig.de/en/bach-competition/bach-competition-20202021)

## Basel Composition Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION March 3-7, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Now in its third edition, this biennial composition competition open to composers of all ages and nationalities was established in memory of the conductor Paul Sacher. The panel, including Unsuk Chin, will award a series of cash prizes, topped by a First of CHF60,000. At the time of writing, 12 compositions – eight for symphony orchestra, four for chamber – had been selected, to be premiered in March by Basel Chamber Orchestra, Basel Sinfonietta and the Basel Symphony Orchestra, and streamed later via the competition's YouTube channel.

[baselcompetition.com/en](http://baselcompetition.com/en)

## International Telekom Beethoven Competition Bonn

**NEXT COMPETITION December 2-11, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE May 14, 2021**

Taking place biennially since 2005, this Beethoven-themed competition

for pianists aged between 16 and 32 is based in Beethoven's native city and encompasses works from every phase of his creative life, alongside the music of his contemporaries. As well as significant cash prizes, all winners are in line for around 50 concert engagements for the two seasons after the competition. Catch the whole competition live-streamed on its website.

[telekom-beethoven-competition.de/itbcb-en](http://telekom-beethoven-competition.de/itbcb-en)

## International Jeunesses Musicales Competition Belgrade

### NEXT COMPETITION

**March 21-30, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**December 31, 2021**

This annual Belgrade competition rotates between flute, guitar, piano and cello. The 2021 edition, postponed from 2020, is for cellists up to the age of 35. The top three will be awarded cash prizes, while special prizes include a concert in Smetana Hall and a work of art.

[muzicka-omladina.org](http://muzicka-omladina.org)

## Besançon International Competition for Young Conductors

### NEXT COMPETITION

**September 13-18, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE January 2021**

This French biennial conducting competition for 35s and under sits within the International Music Festival of Besançon, and puts its applicants through their paces with a hugely varied repertoire. In 2017 it was won by Ben Glassberg, whose phenomenal *Concierto de Aranjuez* recording with Thibaut Garcia was a recent Editor's Choice. Spring preliminaries are planned for Berlin, Beijing, Montréal, Paris and Besançon, with 20 candidates then selected to progress to the orchestral rounds in Besançon with the Orchestre National de Lyon.

[festival-besancon.com/en](http://festival-besancon.com/en)

## Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION May 9-15, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

It was the Belcea Quartet who carried off this prestigious triennial competition's Grand Prize in its inaugural year of 1999, and the list



of subsequent winners is notable for the number of those who have gone on to forge strong careers: the Quatuor Akilone (2016), the Schumann Quartett (2013) and the Zemlinsky Quartet (2010) to name but a few; while in 2003 Quatuor Ébène took joint Second with no First awarded. After a brief hiatus, the competition is now under the brand-new artistic direction of yet another major quartet, Quatuor Modigliani, and offering an array of career-enhancing prizes – such as a concert tour managed by CLB Management. What's more, in another new development, you can also expect to see a distinctly vibrant-looking programme of events running alongside the competition element – in the actual competition year itself, but also in the form of two festivals in the 'off' years, focusing on string quartets and masterclasses. These begin in 2021 with a festival featuring the Artemis Quartet and Cuarteto Casals, plus a specially choreographed performance of Ravel's String Quartet from Agnès Letestu, former *Étoile* of the Paris Opera Ballet. As the festival's partner, France Musique will be delivering content to audiences who can't attend in person – but for precise streaming details we suggest checking the website nearer the time.

**quatuorsabordeaux.com**

### Queen Elisabeth Competition, Brussels

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**Piano: May 3-29, 2021**

**Cello: May 9 – June 4, 2022**

**APPLICATIONS Passed (for piano); December 8, 2021 (for cello)**

One of the biggies, this prestigious Belgian competition rotates its disciplines annually between piano, violin, cello and voice (the 2020 piano edition has been postponed to 2021). There are generous remote viewing options: the semifinals and beyond are being streamed live and on demand via the competition's website, and you can find further broadcasting information on the website nearer the time. Those who make it to the semifinals will perform with the Orchestre Royal de Chambre de Wallonie under QEC piano laureate, Frank Braley, while the finalists will play in the

Centre for Fine Arts with the Belgian National Orchestra under Hugh Wolff. As for 2022, this will be the competition's second cello edition; open to cellists aged between 18 and 31, its prizes include a top one of €25,000.

**queenelisabethcompetition.be**

### Feruccio Busoni International Piano Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**August 25 – September 4, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Launched all the way back in 1949, with an extraordinary honorary committee including Arrau, Cortot and Michelangeli, this historic biennial competition saw none other than Martha Argerich win in 1957, aged just 16. As for the prizes, there are cash awards for all top six candidates, crowned by a First of €22,000. There are also numerous special prizes, including concerts at prestigious international institutions. The good news for the rest of us is that the finals are live-streamed on the competition website, in partnership with IDAGIO.

**concorsobusoni.it/en**

### International Maria Canals Music Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION March 13-25, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Founded in 1954 and held at Barcelona's Palau de la Música Catalana, this annual competition is aimed at performers of all nationalities aged between 17 and 28. Disciplines rotate, with 2021 being for pianists (specifically the cohort accepted for the 2020 edition postponed due to Covid). Finalists compete for a covetable bunch of prizes including a First of €25,000 plus concert engagements. Competition events are broadcast live online, and videos of each round are available on the website within hours of each session. Catalonia's classical music radio station, Catalunya Música, broadcasts the final as it happens.

**mariacanal.org**

### Chopin Competition, Warsaw

**NEXT COMPETITION October 2-23, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Established in 1927, this major competition for pianists born between 1990 and 2004 has

championed right from its earliest days not just the music of Fredryck Chopin, but also playing it as Chopin himself envisaged it. The 2021 edition is the remounted Covid-postponed 2020 edition, thus with its participants already selected. The jury includes Martha Argerich, Nelson Goerner and Nelson Freire, who are awarding a long list of prizes topped by a First of €40,000 plus a gold medal. Those who can't get to Warsaw can catch it streamed online in HD and VR.

**chopin2020.pl**

### International Music Competition Cologne

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**September 13-18, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE May 14, 2021**

This triennial competition is organised by Cologne University of Music and Dance in cooperation with the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), whose orchestra accompanies the finalists. This edition, postponed from 2020, is open to singers and pianists of all nationalities aged under 32, and offers a top prize of €10,000. The overall winner is also offered concert engagements, including one with the WDR Funkhausorchester.

**imwk.hfmt-koeln.de/en**

### George Enescu International Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**May 13-23, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Open to violinists, pianists, cellists and composers, this major biennial competition under the artistic direction of Vladimir Jurowski is part of the George Enescu International Festival, Romania's largest international cultural event. While the 2020 composition category happened as usual, the instrumental competitions began online in September 2020 but will continue live this May. Beyond the cash prizes, the overall winner will give concerts during the 2021 festival.

**festivalenescu.ro/en**

### Grand Prix Emanuel Feuermann

**NEXT COMPETITION November 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Held every four years by the Kronberg Academy in collaboration with the Berlin University of the Arts,

this prestigious competition with generous prizes is open to cellists of all nationalities. The 2020 edition has been postponed until 2022.

**gp-emanuelfeuermann.de**

### Geneva International Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**October 16-29, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE April 10, 2021**

Founded in 1939, this competition rotates its disciplines annually. Its list of laureates includes Martha Argerich, Emmanuel Pahud and Sir Georg Solti. The 2021 edition for oboe will have running alongside it the postponed 2020 competition for cellists; and all those cellists who were eligible and applied for 2020 are able to carry their applications across. Finalists get to perform with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, and prizes range from CHF8,000 to CHF20,000. Prizewinners also benefit from a career development programme. The final rounds will be live-streamed on the competition's website and social media platforms.

**concoursgeneve.ch**

### International Edvard Grieg Piano Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**September 17-25, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE April 20, 2021**

Hosted by the KODE Edvard Grieg Museum Troidhaugen in Bergen, Norway, this competition is open to pianists of all nationalities born between 1987 and 2004. The final takes place in Grieg Hall, and First Prize is €30,000 plus a series of concert engagements. All rounds are live-streamed.

**griegcompetition.com**

### Clara Haskil Piano Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**August 27 – September 3, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE April 28, 2021**

Hosted by the Swiss town of Vevey, where pianist Clara Haskil lived from 1942 until her death, this competition is distinctive for offering only one ranked prize: the Clara Haskil Prize, consisting of CHF25,000, accompanied by various concert engagements. The finalists are accompanied by the Zermatt Festival Orchestra.

**clara-haskil.ch/en/home**



### International Vocal Competition's-Hertogenbosch

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**August 23-29, 2021; summer 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE 2021**

Founded in 1954, this is the Netherlands' only classical vocal competition, encompassing oratorio and art song as well as opera, with a focus on 20th-century and contemporary music. For 2021, the discipline is Lied duo, open to singers of 18 years and above, born on or after December 5, 1987. The opera and oratorio edition has been postponed from 2020 to 2022.

**ivc.nu**

### International Competition for Young Pianists in Memory of Vladimir Horowitz, Kiev

**NEXT COMPETITION See website**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

This Kiev-based piano competition is split between four age categories which rotate. This year should have been for the senior category, covering pianists born between April 20, 1987 and April 20, 2004, all vying for a First Prize of \$20,000, but Covid led to it being cancelled. Details of what happens next weren't available as we went to press, so keep checking the website.

**horowitzv.org**

### International Joseph Joachim Violin Competition Hanover

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**September 26 - October 9, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE March 25, 2021**

It's all change for 2021, thanks to the arrival of a new pair of artistic directors, Antje Weithaas and Oliver Wille. Thus, the competition is aiming to attract more mature violinists by raising the age limit to 32 (previously it was 27) and lowering the cash prizes. What's more, the non-cash prizes (including a three-year loan of a Guadagnini) no longer automatically go to the Joseph Joachim Prizewinner, but are instead distributed as the judges see fit. Speaking of judges, the pre-selections now fall to the string section leaders of the NDR Radiophilharmonie, who accompany the finalists under the baton of director Andrew Manze. The semifinalists, meanwhile, will be supported by Camerata Bern.

**www.jjv-hannover.de/en**

### Khachaturian International Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION June 6-14, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

This annual Yerevan-based competition rotates disciplines between piano, violin, cello, voice and conducting. Next year, it's for conductors of all nationalities, and while the details weren't available as we went to press the prizes awarded in previous years have been worth having - for example, a First Prize equal to \$15,000 plus concert engagements. So do keep checking online for developments.

**khachaturian-competition.com**

### Livorno Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**February 16-20, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

The main Livorno Piano Competition is open to pianists under the age of 33, who are all competing for a First Prize of €4000 plus concert engagements. There are also various competitions for younger age categories. The 2021 edition was still in its planning stages as we went to press, so keep an eye online for updates.

**livornopianocompetition.com**

### Long Thibaud Crespin International Violin Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**November 5-13, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Established in 1943 and operating three annually rotating disciplines of piano, violin and voice, the LTC is sticking to the originally planned violin contest for 2021 (in other words, the cancelled 2020 voice competition has not been carried over). Finer details weren't available as we went to press, but if it's anything like as successful as the 2018 event, which was the first with a new and refreshed format, then it'll be one worth watching closely. That 2018 relaunch under the artistic direction of Renaud Capuçon featured an industry-relevant jury including violinist James Ehnes, conductor Yan Pascal Tortelier and Verbier Festival founder Martin Engstroem (formerly of Deutsche Grammophon), and offered prizes including a fine instrument by Patrick Robin, the three-year loan of a Giovanni Battista Guadagnini



Violinist Vikram Sedona receives the top prize at the Enescu Competition in 2018

instrument, a recording on Warner Classics and concert engagements. The result was a genuinely interesting clutch of finalists (who we could all watch, thanks to the finals being streamed on medicity), and an album from winner Diana Tishchenko ('Strangers in Paradise') which was enthusiastically reviewed in these pages. The 2021 edition is likewise under the direction of Capuçon. So, in other words, roll on November!

**long-thibaud-crespin.org**

### Lyon International Chamber Music Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION April 20-25, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Established back in 2004, this chamber music competition focuses on a different instrumental grouping each year, and counts among its laureates the aforementioned 2018 Long Thibaud Crespin winner violinist Diana Tishchenko. The 2021 edition is in fact the postponed 2020 edition for violin and piano duos, featuring the same young artists who were initially selected for 2020 but subsequently unable to compete due to the pandemic. Equally unchanged is the remainder of the competition: the repertoire features a commission from Florentine Mulsant; jurors include the violinist Nora Chastain and pianist Itamar Golan; and beyond the cash prizes are career development assistance and the possibility of concert engagements. Streaming-wise you can catch it live and on catch-up via NoMadMusic.

**cimcl.fr**

### Malko Competition for Young Conductors

**NEXT COMPETITION June 7-12, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Established in 1965, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra's triennial competition for conductors is open to all nationalities born after June 12, 1986, and has a list of laureates including Ryan Bancroft (2018), Rafael Payare (2012) and Joshua Weilerstein (2009); and as those rising names suggest, the First Prize has serious career development potential: €20,000 in cash; a year's career support and advice; mentoring from the Jury Chairman and DNSO Chief Conductor Fabio Luisi; and, perhaps most importantly, engagements with a substantial list of international symphonies including the Oslo Philharmonic, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra. Other points worth mentioning are that repertoire for 2021 includes a new competition commission by Britta Byström, and that all rounds will be recorded, broadcast and streamed.

**malkocompetition.dk**

### 'Classic Piano' Malta International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**April 20 - May 9, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Organised by the European Foundation for Support of Culture, Classic Piano is actually the final stage of 14 piano competitions for under 35s that have been taking



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DESIGN: TWKS.CH — PHOTO: BERTRAND COTTET





Scottish-trained American Ryan Bancroft, winner of the 2018 Malko Competition

place around the world during 2019 and 2020: in Hamburg, Vienna, Washington, Shanghai, Tel Aviv, Tokyo, Rome, Seoul, Zurich, London, Antwerp, Berlin, Moscow and Yerevan. The top five players (from 70 in total) are now to compete at the final stage in Valletta. Comprising four rounds, this has an impressive prize fund of €300,000, and a jury chaired by Constantine Orbelian, featuring names such as Michel Béroff and Pavel Gililov.

**14waystomalta2021.eu**

### International Instrumental Competition Markneukirchen

**NEXT COMPETITION May 6-15, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE January 31, 2021**

This annual competition alternates between string and wind instruments, with 2021 open to violinists and double bassists. There are cash prizes for each discipline, and the winners also receive a concert engagement with the Chursächsische Philharmonie Bad Elster, among other special prizes.

**instrumental-competition.de**

### International Violin Competition Henri Marteau

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**April 23 - May 6, 2023**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

This triennial competition for violinists run by the Hofer Symphoniker takes place in Lichtenberg's Haus Marteau and the Freiheitshalle in Hof. It should have taken place in 2020, but, like so many events, was called off due to the world health crisis, meaning the next edition will now be in 2023.

See online for details regarding participation and streaming.

**violinwettbewerb-marteau.de**

### Meistersinger von Nürnberg Singing Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

The Nuremberg State Theatre's biennial competition for singers would have taken place in 2020 had it not been for the pandemic. As a result, it has been postponed until 2021, remaining open to all those who would have been eligible last year - namely, singers aged between 18 and either 33 (women) or 35 (men) who have some professional experience under their belts already, or are enrolled as students at a conservatoire. International preselections will take place as previously planned in Moscow, Brussels, Nuremberg, Hamburg and Seattle, and the jury for the actual competition is presided over by the Wagner tenor Professor Siegfried Jerusalem. The prizes equally remain unchanged, including a First of €10,000, Second of €6000 and Third of €4000, plus various special prizes. Applications are expected to open at the start of 2021, so keep an eye on the website.

**www.nuernberg-competition.com**

### Carl Nielsen International Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**March 31 - April 10, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

The next edition of this Odense-based competition may not be until

2022, but it's major and prestigious enough for us to want to give it a shout out nevertheless, not least because when it announces its 2022 details the prizes will be covetable ones. For instance, up for grabs under the presidency of Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider in 2019 (which for the first time concurrently ran its previously rotating violin, clarinet and flute competitions) were €12,000, a solo recording with the Odense Symphony Orchestra on Orchid Classics, and the chance to perform with up to 10 orchestras.

**carlnielsenscompetition.com**

### International Piano Competition of Orléans for Youth 'Brin d'herbe'

**NEXT COMPETITION July 7-10, 2021**

**APPLICATIONS See website**

Alternating annually between the International Piano Competition of Orléans (notably with an age limit slightly higher than the norm, accepting applicants aged up to 36) and the 'Brin d'herbe' junior competition, this contest with a focus on contemporary music actually managed, against all the odds, to stage its 2020 edition for adults, meaning that 2021 will be the junior edition as planned, with a repertoire list covering from 1900 to the present day.

**oci-piano.com**

### Premio Paolo Borciani International String Quartets Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION June 5-13, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**December 15, 2020**

Taking place triennially at the Teatro Municipale Valli in Reggio Emilia, this international string quartet competition has a starry roster of previous winners including the Keller Quartet (1990), the Pavel Haas Quartet (2005) and the Artemis Quartet (2007). Had all gone to plan, 2020 would have been a competition year, but it's now been postponed until 2021. Beyond €25,000 in cash, First Prize also includes a 2021-22 artistic residency in Reggio Emilia and an international tour encompassing Germany, Austria, France, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and the UK. Repertoire-wise, it also puts its competitors through their stylistic

paces, encompassing music from the 1700s to the present day, with this year's compulsory work being from a prominent contemporary composer, Toshio Hosokawa. As for the jury, they're a bunch that any young ensemble would want to be in front of; presided over by the Philharmonie de Paris's Emmanuel Hondré, its members include viola player Kim Kashkashian and Tokyo String Quartet violinist Martin Beaver.

**www.iteatri.re.it/2020/09/premio-paolo-borciani-5-13-giugno-2021**

### International Percussion Competition Luxembourg

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**February 12-20, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE July 31, 2021**

This percussion-centred Luxembourg competition rotates annually between composition and performance, the latter's participants being required to perform the winning work from the previous composition year. For 2020 and 2021 the focus has been percussion trio, with the composition competition requiring a work featuring one mallet instrument. This was won by Taiwanese composer Wen-chi Tsai with *Comme la rosée, aussi comme l'éclair* but as a result of Covid, the trio competition has now been postponed from 2021 to 2022, at which point the prizes will include a First of €21,000 in cash..

**ipcl.lu**

### Michele Pittaluga International Guitar Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**September 20-25, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

One of the few international guitar contests, this Italian competition is also doing its bit to expand the guitar repertoire by running a composition for guitar category alongside its main one for guitarists themselves. As a result of Covid, the 2020 edition for guitarists was unable to go ahead, so it has been postponed until 2021. Further details on eligibility, the application process and the prizes weren't available as we went to press, but we can tell you that the rewards planned for the 2020 edition included a First of





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[pittaluga.org](http://pittaluga.org)

### Prague Spring International Music Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION May 6-15, 2021 (piano and string quartet) May 2022 (bassoon and clarinet)**  
**APPLICATION DEADLINE January 29, 2021 (piano and string quartet) September 30, 2021 (bassoon and clarinet)**

Sitting within the prestigious Prague Spring Festival, this major Czech competition has annually rotating disciplines, and as a result of Covid there's more information than usual to impart on it this year. Firstly, the 2020 competition for bassoonists and clarinettists has been postponed in unaltered form until 2022 – the results of the 2020 preliminary rounds are still valid, but those previously successful applicants need to submit a brand new registration form; then if they don't all wish to keep their places, an additional preliminary round will be held to fill the vacancies. Meanwhile, the 2021 competition is for pianists and string quartets, with the piano jury chaired by Garrick Ohlsson and the string quartet one chaired by Michal Kaňka of the Pražák Quartet. The generous prizes include Firsts of CZK250,000 for piano and CZK500,000 for string quartet, and for both category winners there is the offer of prestigious concert engagements. Catch the later rounds of each competition live-streamed on the event's website and social media platforms.

[festival.cz/en/competition](http://festival.cz/en/competition)

### The Queen Sonja International Music Competition, Norway

**NEXT COMPETITION June 2021 (preliminaries, no travel required); August 13-20, 2021 (semifinal onwards)**  
**APPLICATION DEADLINE April 1, 2021**  
 One of the world's leading voice competitions, and always with a panel of prominent judges, this biennial contest counts soprano Lise Davidsen amongst its recent winners (2015), *Gramophone's* 2018 Young Artist of the Year. Applicants are put through their paces over a mix of aria and Lied, with Norwegian composers also being

a compulsory element; plus, running alongside the actual competition are career development sessions and masterclasses. Finalists then get to perform with the Norwegian National Opera Orchestra at Oslo Opera House, competing for a generous list of prizes topped by a First of €50,000 and an original piece of art by HM Queen Sonja; plus possible concert engagements with leading Norwegian musical institutions. Those who can't make it to Oslo can watch remotely via the live streams on the competition website; these will even include the live digital preliminary rounds in June.

[qsimc.no/en](http://qsimc.no/en)

### International Conducting Competition Rotterdam

**NEXT COMPETITION May 23 - June 4, 2021**  
**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**  
 When there aren't all that many conducting competitions, this brand new one is a welcome sight. Plus, its format is both an interesting and challenging one: multiple well-known orchestras – Budapest Festival Orchestra, Doelen Ensemble, Orchestra of the 18th Century, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Symphony Chorus, Sinfonia Rotterdam – plus a different genre for each of its six rounds, ranging from Romantic to contemporary as well as opera and oratorio. There will then be a winner for each round, plus an overall winner for the best all-round conductor. Jurors include Iván Fisher, Sophie de Lint, Wayne Marshall, Lahav Shani, Maxim Vengerov, Philippe Herreweghe, Ton Koopman, James MacMillan and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and they're awarding a total of €70,000 in prize money, plus a career development programme for all prizewinners. What's more, we can all watch it because the entire competition will be broadcast on the competition website and on YouTube.

[iccr.nl](http://iccr.nl)

### International Chamber Music Competition 'Franz Schubert and Modern Music'

**NEXT COMPETITION February 2022**  
**APPLICATION DEADLINE October 2021**  
 Established by the University of

Music and Performing Arts Graz in 1989, this triennial competition aims to bring Schubert's chamber music into relation with new repertoire, and its commitment to this runs to the extent of composition competitions and the commissioning of new works. International young ensembles then come to Graz to compete within a free-admission, multi-day festival of chamber music which has around €65,000 of prize money on offer. The two chamber categories for 2022, postponed from the February 2021 edition, are duo for voice and piano (Lied), and trio for piano, violin and cello.

[schubert.kug.ac.at/en](http://schubert.kug.ac.at/en)

### International Jean Sibelius Violin Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION May 18-29, 2022**  
**APPLICATION DEADLINE January 31, 2022**  
 With its previous winners including Leonidas Kavakos and Viktoria Mullova, this competition held every five years by the Sibelius Society and the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki is a real one to watch. The postponed 2020 edition has now been reset for 2022, but note that this won't affect the long-term schedule, with the following edition still planned for 2025. Back to 2022 though, which is open to all violinists born in or after 1990, and unsurprisingly features very strongly the music of Jean Sibelius: his chamber music in the earlier rounds, and then the great Violin Concerto as the one obligatory concerto in the final round. The jury chaired by Sakari Oramo includes Pekka Kuusisto (the 1995 competition winner), and they're awarding a bunch of prizes with serious career-launching potential. For instance, beyond €30,000 cash, First Prize comes with mentoring from both Oramo and Kuusisto, plus a performance with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. What's more, any one of the finalists could be offered a concerto engagement with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra under John Storgårds, and also an engagement with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra.  
[sibeliuscompetition.fi/en/home.html](http://sibeliuscompetition.fi/en/home.html)

### Smetana International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION April 19-25, 2021**  
**APPLICATION DEADLINE January 31, 2021**  
 Held in Pilsen in the Czech Republic, this competition has three age categories: the first is for 16 years and younger; the second is for 20 years and younger; and the third is for 30 years and under. The 2021 edition is in fact the postponed 2020 one, and finalists in the third category will perform with the Pilsen Philharmonic Orchestra. Among the cash prizes on offer, to be awarded by a jury comprising Czech Republic artists and piano teachers, include for the third category a First of CZK50,000.  
[piano-competition.com](http://piano-competition.com)

### International JM Sperger Competition for Double Bass

**NEXT COMPETITION March 27 - April 3, 2022**  
**APPLICATION DEADLINE Opens May 2021**  
 Readers may have noticed the recent crop of fine young double bass players who see themselves as much as soloists as orchestral members – something which would no doubt have pleased the 18th-century double bass virtuoso Johannes Sperger. However, the number of international competitions exclusively for bassists isn't yet quite reflecting this trend, meaning we're all the more keen to give a shout out to those that do exist. The 2020 edition of the biennial JM Sperger Competition has had to be postponed until 2022. We're glad to announce, though, that the plans for 2022 are already very much in place. The jury itself is to be chaired by Reinhart von Gutzeit, and includes Chi-Chi Nwanoku (Chinekel), Gunars Upatnieks (Berlin Philharmonic) and David Sinclair (Tafelmusik, etc). The week will also feature an exhibition plus masterclasses from the jurors. As for the prizes, they are rather spectacular: up for grabs are a variety of instruments, bows, concert engagements, special awards and cash gifts up to the value of €15,000. The entire competition is open to the public, and will also be streamed live on the competition website.  
[spergerwettbewerb.de/index.php/en](http://spergerwettbewerb.de/index.php/en)



### Tibor Varga International Violin Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**August 28 – September 4, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE April 15, 2021**

This biennial competition for violinists aged 26 and under is hosted by the Swiss town of Sion, and offers finalists both the chance to perform with the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, and with cellist Marc Coppey and pianist Konstantin Lifschitz in its trio section. Coppey and Lifschitz then form part of the final-round jury, chaired by Salvatore Accardo, which also includes, throughout the competition, Kolja Blacher, Friedemann Eichhorn, Koichiro Harada, Yuzuko Horigome, Ida Kavafian and Pavel Vernikov. The First Prize on offer next year is a substantial cash one of CHF20,000.

**sion-concours.ch**

### Top of the World International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION June 18-24, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**Opens September 2021**

Open to pianists of all nationalities aged between 17 and 35, this competition takes place in Norway's midnight sun city, Tromsø, and offers cash rewards for its three top-ranking finalists of €30,000, €20,000 and €10,000. It's usually biennial, but while the most recent competition was in 2019, the current pandemic crisis has seen the next edition postponed until 2022.

**topoftheworld.no**

### International Singing Competition of Toulouse

**NEXT COMPETITION See website**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

Held biennially at the Théâtre du Capitole Toulouse, and open to young singers aged between 18 and 32, this competition's repertoire encompasses opera excerpts, oratorio and Lieder, with participants required to perform at least one piece by a French composer. Competition finalists are accompanied by the Toulouse Capitole Orchestra, and they're competing for prizes including First and Second (in both the male and female categories) of €6500 and €3200 respectively. If everything is running as usual then the next

edition will be in 2021, but with no further information available as we went to press, this is one you'll need to keep checking the website for.

**theatreducapitole.fr/web/guest/concours-international-de-chant**

### Iturbi International Piano Competition València

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**June 23 – July 2, 2021**

**APPLICATIONS January 14, 2021**

Open to pianists of all nationalities born after June 23, 1985, the 21st Iturbi Competition is responding to the difficulties of Covid by waiving its usual registration fees. Those who are successful in reaching the finals will be competing for prizes including a First of €30,000 plus a CD recording. It's also worth noting that one of the members of the jury chaired by Joaquín Achúcarro is none other than Menahem Pressler. For those wishing to watch remotely, the competition will be live-streaming from the semifinals onwards.

**pianoiturbi.dival.es**

### International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**October 7-21, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**November 15, 2021**

Open to violinists of all nationalities born between 1991 and 2006, and with works by Henryk Wieniawski occupying a prominent position in the repertoire list, this Poznań competition's first ever winner was Ginette Neveu, followed in later years by David Oistrakh and Grażyna Bacewicz – which gives you an idea of the weight of this competition. It takes place every five years, and while normally its next (16th) edition would have been in 2021, this has been postponed to 2022 due to the likely accumulation of postponed competitions this coming year (but note the application deadline of 2021). Those violinists making it through get to perform before a jury chaired by yet another big performing name, Augustin Dumay, and to compete for cash prizes totalling €115,000, including a First of €50,000. All three competition stages are open to the public and likely to be streamed.

**konkurs.wieniawski.pl/en**



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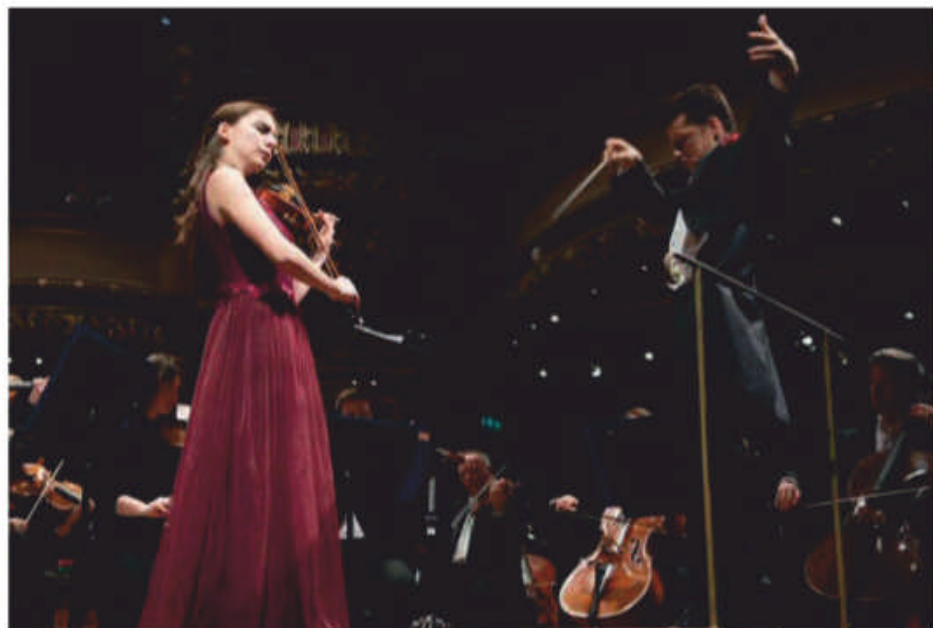
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# US & REST OF WORLD GUIDE



Diana Adamyan, winner of the Senior category of the 2018 Menuhin Competition

## Azrieli Music Prizes

**NEXT COMPETITION November 2021**

**(winners announced)**

**October 2022 (gala concert)**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**May 2021 (Azrieli Commission)**

**September 2021 (Jewish Music)**

Founded in 2014 by the Azrieli Foundation, the Azrieli Music Prizes (AMP) celebrate excellence in music composition with two biennial competitions for the international music community: the Azrieli Prize for Jewish Music – a discovery prize for an existing work; and the Azrieli Commission for Jewish Music – a creation prize for a new work that addresses the question ‘What is Jewish Music?’. Both competitions are open to composers of all backgrounds, faiths and nationalities. The two laureates selected by the AMP jury will receive a package including a \$50,000CAD cash prize, professional performances and a commercial recording. This time around, the AMP is seeking scores for symphonic orchestra with the option for two soloists, and will announce the laureates in early November 2021. The live element is then an October 2022 gala concert featuring their prize-winning works. [azrielifoundation.org/amp](http://azrielifoundation.org/amp)

## Bradshaw and Buono International Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**May 23, 2021 (winners' concert)**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE April 5, 2021**

Unusually, and rather conveniently in these Covid-stricken times,

this international competition open to solo pianists and piano ensemble (duo/four hands) has no live rounds. Instead it's all done by video selection – and the prize is to perform in a Winners' Recital at Carnegie Hall. It's a competition open to a wide range of ages, because each discipline is divided into the following categories: Elementary School (ages four to 11); Middle School (ages 12 to 14); High School (ages 15 to 18); amateur adults aged 19 and upwards with no professional degree in music; and college students pursuing a degree in music and/or those who have already begun professional careers. [alexanderbuono.com/piano-competition](http://alexanderbuono.com/piano-competition)

## Canadian International Organ Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION October 11-25, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Open to organists born on or before October 17, 1985, this Montreal competition is one of the largest international organ competitions in the world, welcoming a maximum of 16 competitors for three competition rounds taking place in different Montreal churches. The next edition will see the 2020 competition and its already-chosen candidates moving back to 2021. The prizes include a First of \$25,000CAD, a recording on ATMA Classique, three years of career management services and a three-year career development programme. [ciocm.org](http://ciocm.org)

## Cleveland International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION July – August 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE Passed**

Open to pianists aged 18-32, the Cleveland International Piano Competition is the signature event of Piano Cleveland, which presents educational programmes and festivals. The 2021 edition is the postponed 2020 one, featuring the 29 previously selected contestants from 13 countries – all vying for the Mixon First Prize of \$75,000, a Carnegie Hall debut, management services and a recording on the Steinway & Sons label. Every round will be live-streamed on the website. [clevelandpiano.org](http://clevelandpiano.org)

## Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION Spring 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

New York's Concert Artists Guild has been helping young artists launch their concert careers since 1951. Its annual competition offers prizes such as international management support (through its new partnership with the London-based Young Classical Artists Trust), a debut recital at Merkin Hall in New York City, concert bookings, marketing and publicity, and career development mentorship. The 2021 finals will be broadcast online – and if 2019's winners are anything to go by (they included cellist Jamal Aliyev and recorder player Tabea Debus), it will be a show worth watching. [concertartists.org/competition](http://concertartists.org/competition)

## Guitar Foundation of America International Convention and Competitions

**NEXT COMPETITION June 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

The Guitar Foundation of America's annual International Convention features three competitions each year: the International Youth Competition, the International Ensemble Competition and the International Concert Artist Competition. The latter (the largest of the three) is open to guitarists aged 18 or over, and has in the past offered coveted prizes such as \$10,000 in cash,

a Naxos CD and a GFA-sponsored international concert tour including approximately 50 concerts throughout the US and Canada. Details for 2021 hadn't been finalised as we went to press, so keep an eye on the website for updates.

[guitarfoundation.org](http://guitarfoundation.org)

## Hamamatsu International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**November 12-29, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE March 31, 2021**

This triennial competition was founded in 1991 to mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of Hamamatsu City, and aims to celebrate its history and musical tradition – plus nurture musicians and promote international exchange. Noriko Ogawa chairs the 2021 jury, overseeing pianists born on or after January 1, 1991, all of whom are competing for cash prizes plus opportunities to perform in and outside of Japan. Every stage of the competition will be live-streamed on the website.

[hipic.jp](http://hipic.jp)

## Michael Hill International Violin Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE See website**

This Aotearoa-based competition for violinists aged 18 to 28 stands out for two reasons: it's the only New Zealand contest in these pages, and the recipient of the First Prize enjoys an array of prizes all aimed at launching his or her professional career. In addition to NZ\$40,000, the winner also receives a five-week tour of New Zealand and Australia, and a recording on Atoll Records. There's one further gift too – a bespoke suit or gown from a New Zealand designer, and a New Zealand-inspired pendant from Christine Hill's Spirit Bay Collection. Sadly the 2021 edition of the competition has been cancelled due to the pandemic. However, the organisers are hoping to be able to remount it in 2022, pending sufficient funding and sponsorship, so keep your eyes peeled on the website for more information.

[michaelhillviolincompetition.co.nz](http://michaelhillviolincompetition.co.nz)



### Honens International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION** October 14-22, 2021

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** Passed

This major triennial Canadian competition for pianists aged between 20 and 30 holds quarterfinals in Berlin and New York, before the final 10 battle it out in Calgary in front of a jury chaired by Katherine Chi. First Prize carries \$100,000CAD cash, but what really defines this competition is that it offers the overall winner one of the most comprehensive post-competition artistic and career development programmes around: worldwide representation; debut recitals in career-building markets which may include Berlin, London, New York and Toronto; residencies and special projects; coaching and mentoring; and the production, release and worldwide distribution of professional recordings.

**honens.com/2021**

### Isang Yun Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**October 30 – November 7, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** July 31, 2021

Named after Korean composer Isang Yun (1917-95), this competition run by the Tongyeong International Music Foundation is open to violinists of all nationalities born between November 1, 1990 and October 31, 2006. Yun's own music features prominently among the compulsory repertoire, including his Violin Concerto No 3 – one of the finalists' concerto options, to be performed with the Tongyeong Festival Orchestra (whose members include players from the RSNO and Kremerata Baltica). The 2021 edition is the postponed 2020 one, offering a generous list of prizes topped by a cash First of KRW30m. The good news for those of us who can't get to Korea is that it will be streamed on the website.

**isangyuncompetition.org**

### Kobe International Flute Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**August 26 – September 5, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** See website

Established in 1985 and held every four years, this is one of the rare competitions dedicated to the flute alone, and carries

generous cash prizes. The 2021 edition is open to flautists born between 1988 and 2005, and the jury, chaired by Hideaki Sakai, will award prizes including a First of ¥2m together with the possibility of solo recitals and/or orchestral solo appearances in Kobe and elsewhere in Japan. Flute fans worldwide can enjoy regular streams from the competition – keep checking the website for plans nearer the time.

**kobe-flute.jp**

### Menuhin Competition Richmond

**NEXT COMPETITION** May 13-23, 2021

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** Passed

This major biennial violin competition rotates its host world city, with the chosen one for the 2021 edition (postponed from 2020) being Richmond, Virginia. It will be a real one to watch, too. The Menuhin has a particularly strong track record when it comes to picking out talent (its 2008 winner was Ray Chen, for example); and this is perhaps all the more impressive in light of its Senior section having the comparatively low age limit of 22. The competition also has a prestigious Junior category for under 16s (in which Alina Ibragimova was a prizewinner in 2000). Much of the arrangements for 2021 remain unchanged from 2020, including all 44 of the violinists from 18 countries who had already been invited to compete, and most of the judges (including Chair Pamela Frank and Ralph Kirshbaum). As for prizes, these include a Senior section First of \$20,000 coupled with the two-year loan of a golden-period Stradivarius violin, and a Junior section First of \$10,000 alongside a loan of a fine old Italian violin. There's also a whole host of special prizes up for grabs. For instance, one prizewinner will perform at the Gstaad Menuhin Festival 2022, and four prizewinners will be offered participation in the Kronberg Violin Masterclasses in June 2021. Also worth shouting about is the rich programme of concerts and educational activities running along the competition, for which visiting artists include conductor Andrew Litton and the comedy YouTube duo TwoSet Violin.

**menuhincompetition.org**

### Concours Musical International de Montréal

**NEXT COMPETITION** May 22 – June 2, 2021 (piano); 2022 (voice)

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**Passed (piano)**

**Opens August 15, 2021 (voice)**

This competition with rotating disciplines for singers, pianists and violinists should have been for pianists in 2020, but the pandemic has pushed it back to 2021, at which point it will feature the 24 candidates already chosen in the 2020 preselections. Worth noting is that its jury is one of the most industry-representative on the competitions circuit; beyond prominent teachers, there's also the New York Philharmonic Orchestra's former President and Executive Director Zarin Mehta, and Verbier Festival founder and former Deutsche Grammophon executive Martin Engstroem. Those who make it to the finals get to perform with the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, competing for \$150,000 in prizes and grants, including a cash First Prize of \$30,000.

**concoursmontreal.ca**

### Osaka Chamber Music Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION** May 16-23, 2021

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** Passed

Organised by the Japan Chamber Music Foundation, this triennial event for under-35s aims to increase the appeal of chamber music, and carries Yen cash prizes in the millions. 2020 should have been a competition year, but this has been postponed to 2021. Presenting two competition disciplines, Section 1 features the string quartet, while Section 2 focuses on piano trios and piano quartets. The jury is particularly impressive, chaired by Suntory Hall Director General Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi and including members of Trio Wanderer and the Jean Sibelius Quartet. A second strand of the event is the Festa competition, open to ensembles of two or more, specialising in all genres of music and with no restrictions on instruments or age. Although there's still a jury, it comprises selected members of the public audience. Lots of musical diversity, then – and, even better, all performances from both strands

are to be live-streamed on the competition website.

**jcmf.or.jp**

### Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION**

**April 18 – May 3, 2021**

**APPLICATIONS** Passed

This major Tel Aviv-based competition is for pianists aged between 18 and 32. Its first ever winner was Emanuel Ax, while Daniil Trifonov has been a more recent winner. The 2021 edition sits under the brand-new artistic direction of Ariel Cohen, and, in a familiar story, is in fact the postponed 2020 version, featuring those pianists who had originally qualified for 2020. Similarly, the members of the jury chaired by Arie Vardi are largely unchanged. Of the many prizes up for grabs, which include high-profile recording and concert opportunities, the most covetable one – the Gold Medal – carries the value of \$40,000.

**arims.org.il**

### Schoenfeld International String Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION** July 15-30, 2021

**APPLICATION DEADLINE** Passed

As far as impressive competition venues go, it's hard to beat this China-based biennial contest, because its headline venue is Harbin's striking Grand Theater evoking wind and water, alongside the Harbin Conservatory of Music. Supported by Harbin's century-old symphony orchestra, the competition is split into two categories, covering multiple disciplines: solo violinists and cellists under the age of 32, who compete for a top prize of \$30,000; and then chamber musicians aged between 17 and 35, divided into piano trio, piano quartet and string quartet, who stand to win \$20,000. Past notable laureates include current BBC New Generation Artist Anastasia Kobekina, who took Second Prize in 2018. The 2021 edition will in fact be the postponed 2020 edition, featuring all those young artists who originally qualified for 2020. Equally, the remainder of the details are expected to remain largely the same. For example, the jury will still be headed up by French



violinist Jean-Jacques Kantorow and Finnish cellist Arto Noras, while the competition will still be partnered with the second Schoenberg International Arts Leaders' Summit, presenting industry discussions on strings and young talent. As for remote viewing options, check online nearer the time.

[schoenfeldcompetition.com](http://schoenfeldcompetition.com)

### China Shenzhen International Piano Concerto Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**October 26–November 7, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE May 1, 2021**

Another competition mounting its postponed 2020 edition in 2021, the Shenzhen usually takes place triennially, and its previous winners include Zuo Zhang, Mariya Kim and Galina Chistiakova. Finalists are given the opportunity to perform with the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra under Daye Lin. The top three prizes are worth \$30,000, \$20,000 and \$15,000 respectively, and there are also concert engagements to be won with major Chinese symphony orchestras. Members of an esteemed jury include Vincenzo Balzani and Michel Béroff.

[csipcc.com.cn](http://csipcc.com.cn)

### Singapore International Violin Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**January 16-28, 2022**

**APPLICATIONS DEADLINE**

**September 15, 2021**

This triennial competition gives all its emerging violinists the opportunity to perform in major Singapore venues such as Esplanade Concert Hall and Victoria Concert Hall, playing to a high-level jury chaired by Qian Zhou. Perhaps the most striking feature of this event is the nature of its array of prizes, because in addition to more than \$110,000 in cash, plus concert engagements, each of the six finalists is eligible for a three-year loan of a fine instrument from the Rin Collection; we're not aware of any another competition that loans fine instruments to so many candidates. January 2021 should have been the next 'on' year, but the current pandemic has meant that it's been postponed by a year, remaining

open to all those who fulfil the original eligibility criteria of being born after December 31, 1990. Also unchanged will be the competition's generous streaming offering, which gives us remote viewing access not just across the finals and 'grand finals', but also to the first round and semifinals.

[singaporeviolincompetition.com](http://singaporeviolincompetition.com)

### 2020 Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**August 10-29, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**January 31, 2021**

Note that although the application deadline for the 2021 edition of this major Shanghai competition falls at the end of this coming January, this is the postponed 2020 edition; thus, it still carries that year in its title, along with the name of Isaac Stern whose centenary the edition was to be marking – and as such is only open to those who completed the online application the first time around. For the rest of us, this is one whose generous remote viewing options we'll want to make the most of, not least because its industry-relevant jury – including violinists Maxim Vengerov and Glenn Dicterow – bodes well for the judging process. Prizes include a cash First of \$100,000 and the Isaac Stern Human Spirit Award, awarded to an individual from any field and from any part of the world who is deemed to have made an outstanding contribution to our understanding of humanity through the medium of music.

[sisivc.shsymphony.com](http://sisivc.shsymphony.com)

### Takamatsu International Piano Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**March 15-28, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**September 20, 2021**

Held every four years, the Takamatsu International Piano Competition is open to pianists of all nationalities born between January 1, 1987 and January 1, 2007, and complements its international remit with developing music and culture within its immediate community. Finalists are given the opportunity to perform with the Seto Philharmonic Orchestra

under Junichi Hirokami, and prizes include a top cash prize of ¥3m, plus solo and concerto performance opportunities in Japanese and overseas concert halls, and with Japanese and overseas orchestras.

[tipc.jp](http://tipc.jp)

### Tokyo International Conducting Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**September 27 – October 3, 2021**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**Opens February 1, 2021**

Open to conductors of all nationalities aged under 38 at the time of the final round, this triennial conducting competition has an impressive jury for 2021, chaired by NHK Symphony Orchestra Permanent Conductor Tadaaki Otaka. All rounds take place at Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, with the applicants conducting the Tokyo PO in the two preliminary rounds and the New Japan PO in the Final. The top award is a ¥2m cash prize, plus a St Petersburg concert at the 2022 Musical Olympus International Festival. Furthermore, all the winners receive a Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall professional engagement with the NHK Symphony Orchestra, plus a Hungarian engagement with the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music Concert Hall.

[conductingtokyo.org](http://conductingtokyo.org)

### Unisa International Strings Competition

#### NEXT COMPETITION

**January 24 – February 5, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE**

**See website**

With an impressive list of alumni including Renée Fleming, Johan Botha and Marc-André Hamelin, the Unisa International Music Competition – based in Pretoria, South Africa – rotates disciplines between piano, voice and strings. For 2022, the focus is on strings: 'Classical Strings', namely violin and cello; and 'Jazz Strings', for guitar and bass. With cash prizes totalling \$150,000, and a return flight and free accommodation for each chosen competitor – plus a final round performed with full orchestra – this is one contest every musician aged 30 or under will want to enter.

[unisa.ac.za/musicfoundation](http://unisa.ac.za/musicfoundation)

### Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION June 2-18, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE October 14, 2021**

Established in 1962 and with laureates including Radu Lupu and, more recently, Beatrice Rana, the prestigious Van Cliburn Competition runs every four years at Bass Performance Hall in Fort Worth, Texas, and is open to pianists aged between 18 and 30. The next edition should have been in 2021, but due to the current uncertainties this has now been postponed to 2022, with the year of eligibility correspondingly extended. Chair of the Jury is none other than Marin Alsop, who also conducts the finals with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, and her panel includes names such as Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Stephen Hough, Andreas Haefliger and Gabriela Montero. Furthermore, beyond the cash prizes, the overall winner will benefit from comprehensive career management, artistic support and publicity campaigns for the three years following his or her win. And let's not forget the international profile to be gained from entering, with the global online viewership expected to exceed five million.

[cliburn.org](http://cliburn.org)

### Waring International Piano Competition

**NEXT COMPETITION April 10-18, 2022**

**APPLICATION DEADLINE October 15, 2021**

Based in Palm Desert, California, and hosted by the College of the Desert, this biennial competition switches between Juniors (12 and under) and Intermediates (13-17), and Seniors (18-30), with masterclasses running alongside the actual competing, which is split into solo and concerto divisions. The next edition is the Senior one, and while in normal circumstances this would have been in 2021, it has instead been postponed until 2022. The first concerto round sees the contestants accompanied by another piano, after which the concerto finals are with full orchestra. Both the solo and the concerto divisions come with a wealth of prizes: \$10,000 for First, then \$5000 for Second and \$2500 for Third.

[vwipc.org](http://vwipc.org)



# The 5th Takamatsu International PIANO COMPETITION

2022  
Mar.15 → Mar.28

## Submit your application!

April 1 - September 20, 2021

WORLD FEDERATION  
OF INTERNATIONAL  
MUSIC COMPETITIONS

Member of the  
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### Schedule

March 15 (Tue) - March 28 (Mon), 2022

Round 1	March 15 (Tue) - March 17 (Thu)	3 days
Round 2	March 19 (Sat) - March 20 (Sun)	2 days
Round 3	March 22 (Tue) - March 23 (Wed)	2 days
Final • Awarding Ceremony	March 26 (Sat) - March 27 (Sun)	2 days
Winners' Concert	March 28 (Mon)	

### Venue

Main Hall, Sunport Hall Takamatsu

### Application Period

April 1 - September 20, 2021  
(as indicated by the postmark on the envelope)

### Eligibility

Individuals born between January 1, 1987 and January 1, 2007



## Takamatsu International Piano Competition Office

Central Tamachi Bldg. 6F, 11-5, Tamachi, Takamatsu, Kagawa, 760-0053, JAPAN TEL: +81-87-812-5583  
FAX: +81-87-812-5584 E-mail: info@tipc.jp URL: <https://www.tipc.jp>

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more  
details.



<https://www.tipc.jp>

2022

Pretoria  
South Africa

## 6th UNISA 2022 International STRINGS COMPETITION

24 January – 5 February

CLASSICAL STRINGS  
Violin & Cello

JAZZ STRINGS  
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[www.unisa.ac.za/musicfoundation](http://www.unisa.ac.za/musicfoundation)  
boshimk@unisa.ac.za

US\$ 150 000  
total prize money

A return economy class  
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selected competitor

Final rounds with  
symphony orchestra and  
rhythm section

Age limit for applicants  
30 years

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MUSIC



# GRAMOPHONE

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Fabrice Fitch salutes radiant performances by Vox Luminis and Lionel Meunier of music by the 17th-century Bohemian composer Andreas Hammerschmidt



### Hammerschmidt

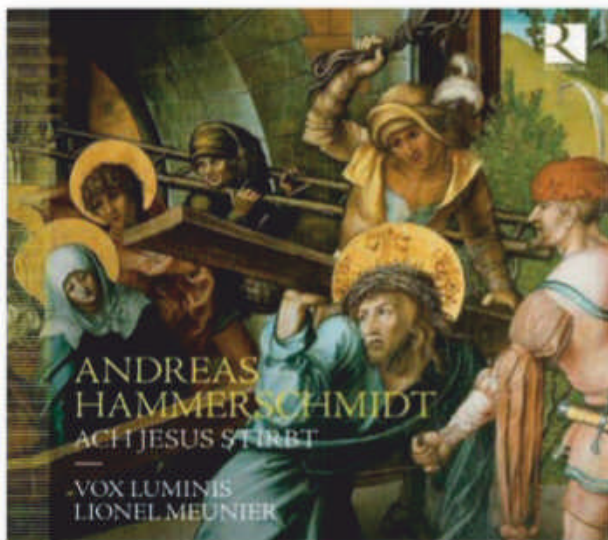
'Ach Jesus stirbt'

Ach Gott, warum hast du mein vergessen. Ach Jesus stirbt. Bis hin an des Creutzes stamm<sup>a</sup>. Christ lag in Todesbanden. Die mit Tränen säen. Erbarm dich mein. Ich bin gewiss, das weder Tod. Ich fahre auf meinem Vater. Ist nicht Ephraim dein theurer Sohn. O barmherziger Vater. Siehe, wie fein und lieblich ists. Triumph, Triumph, Victoria. Vater unser<sup>a</sup>. Warum betrübst du dich, mein Herz. Wer wälzet uns den Stein<sup>a</sup>

Vox Luminis; <sup>a</sup>Clematis / Lionel Meunier  
Ricercar © RIC418 (70' • DDD • T/t)

Compared with the famous triumvirate of his contemporaries, Schütz, Schein and Scheidt (or even Michael Praetorius), Andreas Hammerschmidt (c1611-1675) is an unheralded figure. Those with long memories may recall Joshua Rifkin's recording of a lovely setting of the chorale melody *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* for Nonesuch (which I listen to every year at Christmas), and since then there has been the occasional anthology (by Weser-Renaissance Bremen, for example). So whether he's quite as obscure as is suggested in the notes to Vox Luminis's new offering is a moot point, but here unquestionably he gets in at the front door.

Highly praised in his lifetime as an organist, Hammerschmidt published his compositions at regular intervals throughout his career. This programme draws on a wide range of music, from pieces for solo singers or vocal ensemble with just continuo to polychoral ones with independent instrumental parts. The guiding thread is the Passion story, moving from darkness to light. Towards the end, more festive pieces reveal



*'Everything is immaculately judged and the emotion seems to come from the music itself'*

a different side to the composer (and the ensemble). The subdued atmosphere of the first few pieces has clear echoes of the ensemble's Award-winning account of Schütz's *Musikalische Exequien* (A/11). It is

tempered by the same quality of inner luminosity that characterises the earlier recording – a combination of acoustic, vocal plenitude and clarity, and the continuo group that underpins it. Placing the new recording in such company is, I think, a fair reflection of its quality; in fact I'd say it is finer still, because the soloists' contribution is more telling and even more varied, and the choir's studiously polished sound stretches here to more boldly delineated effects: that repeated cry of 'Ach' at the start of the title-track has the requisite urgency and pathos, whether carried by the ensemble or, later, the soloists. Given how important is the distinction between ensemble and soloists, that balance of tensions seems crucial.

The title-track directly recalls the *Musikalische Exequien*: Hammerschmidt's setting of the words 'Jesus stirbt' ('Jesus is dying') echoes the recurring 'Selig sind die Toten' near the start of the third section of the Schütz. That correspondence is

pursued in later pieces, which share textual links with Schütz's masterpiece, and there are many others. Hammerschmidt excels at textual repeats that function rhetorically, a feature to which this ensemble is unusually responsive. It's not a matter of insistency but of a concentrated delivery that bears repetition. Changes of mood call forth subtle transitions: everything is immaculately judged and the emotion seems to come from the music itself. Such an ego-less approach serves the music admirably.

Aside from their Passiontide destination, the initial handful of pieces is a tightly integrated group, with similar strategies



Lionel Meunier directs Vox Luminis in performances of great beauty





Vocal plenitude and clarity: Vox Luminis bring urgency and pathos to the music of Andreas Hammerschmidt on an album that traces a path from darkness to light

recouping and dialoguing with each other. In *O barmherziger Vater*, Zsuzsi Tóth's subtle quavering tone is most affecting, and in *Warum betrübst du dich*, the repeated exhortation 'Es bleibt alles in der Welt' ('All things in the world remain'), disseminated throughout the choir, is a fine example of the rhetorical strategy I mentioned earlier. A more popular, songlike tone emerges with *Bis hin an des Creutzes stamm*, in which the instrumental ensemble takes on a more independent role. The setting of the famous chorale *Christ lag in Todesbanden* introduces three trombones, and a few pieces later a celebratory note breaks out in the splendid *Triumph, Triumph, Victoria*, reminiscent of Praetorius at his most jubilant. Here be trumpets, and an ever more expansive continuo section, with a bassoon thrown in for good measure (the latter one of the miniature highlights of the album, to my ear). It's worth emphasising again the distinction and quality of the instruments

here: even with strings and continuo as sole accompanists, their combined effect with the choir is very impressive (as at the conclusion of the setting of the Lord's Prayer).

The celebratory *Triumph, Triumph* is nicely set up by the full choir in reflective mode (*Ich bin gewiss, das weder Tod*) just before it; thereafter the mood steadies somewhat with a series of pieces reflecting on the Resurrection and its aftermath. The dialogue principle governing several of the pieces on this recital reaches a peak of complexity in *Wer wälzet uns der Stein*, in which the women at the tomb, the angels, Christ himself and the observing chorus are all protagonists. But in the next piece, *Ist nicht Ephraim dein theurer Sohn*, that complexity is matched with a peak of expressivity, especially (and appropriately) at the words 'Darum bricht mir mein Herz, gegen ihm' ('My heart breaks on his account'): the five vocalists turn in a superb piece of ensemble-singing.

Altogether, this is the standout among the albums I have reviewed in a year where such experiences have seemed more necessary than ever. **G**

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		<b>oas</b>	only available separately



#### Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue



# Orchestral



## David Fanning on Daniil Trifonov's album of 20th-century Russian music:

*'Trifonov excels in Prokofiev's *Sarcasms*, which can not only stand but positively invite his highly capricious treatment'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**



## Jed Distler admires neglected works by American Harold Shapero:

*'Shapero's music stands apart from fashions, never takes the easy way out and communicates with authority'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**

## Ammann • Bartók • Ravel

**Ammann** The Piano Concerto (Gran Toccata)<sup>a</sup>

**Bartók** Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119

**Ravel** Piano Concerto for the Left Hand

**Andreas Haefliger** *pf*

**Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra / Susanna Mälkki**

BIS (F) BIS2310 (76' • DDD/DSD)

<sup>a</sup>Recorded live at the Helsinki Music Centre, November 6 & 7 2019



To title a piece *The Piano Concerto* with the definite article up front may

seem a tad self-aggrandising. Yet Dieter Ammann's ear for sonority and orchestral texture operates on such a high and imaginative level that perhaps he deserves a royal 'the'. The work begins with hammered-out A naturals that soon morph into splattering piano chords dovetailed by percussive fallout. Sweeping arpeggios that sound like Tchaikovsky on amphetamines give way to motoric writing where the pianist and fellow orchestral colleagues subtly intertwine, punctuated by brass rejoinders. Extended solo passages run the gamut from petulant dissonance at both ends of the keyboard to blatantly Romantic padding.

Years ago jazz virtuosos Oscar Peterson and Cecil Taylor shared a concert at Carnegie Hall. They didn't play together, of course, but if you want to imagine what that might have sounded like, go to track 2, around the seven-minute mark. By way of contrast, Ammann provides plenty of lyrical respite, but will offset the slow-moving piano lines with orchestral backgrounds that could be described as the aural equivalent of Salvador Dalí's melted clocks. And just when you think a sequence goes on too long for what it has to say, Ammann pulls yet another dazzling gesture out of his proverbial hat. Although I've long admired Andreas Haefliger's intelligent virtuosity, here he unleashes his inner Tasmanian devil, while Susanna Mälkki and the Helsinki Philharmonic

suffuse the music with prodigious colour and staggering precision.

Colour and precision similarly inform Ravel's Left-Hand Concerto. Instead of the murky mystery one usually gleans from the opening lower-register activity, the thematic kernels emerge in cogent perspective, while the dialogue between brass and strings builds to an intense climax leading into Haefliger's powerfully assured opening cadenza. In the central march, one may miss the tart, unblended orchestral image and lithe wit that always lead me back to the classic Monique Haas/Paul Paray/Orchestre National de France recording (DG, 11/65), yet BIS has the unquestionable sonic advantage.

For sheer textual honesty and attention to articulation, Haefliger and Mälkki leave none of Bartók's Third Concerto's concertante-orientated soloist/ensemble interplay unaccounted for, and the *Adagio religioso*'s climactic evocations of birdsong convey a wide-eyed sparkle and sense of fantasy that is easier to hear than for me to describe. If Haefliger's scrupulous phrasing of the first movement's eloquent unison lines doesn't match the speech-like syntax and atmospheric inflections distinguishing Géza Anda's reference recording (DG, 5/61), such a quibble applies to most other pianists! In short, the Ravel and Bartók make formidable impressions but the Dieter Ammann Concerto will leave you limp with awe. **Jed Distler**

## Beethoven

Piano Concerto No 3, Op 37.

Triple Concerto, Op 56<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>**Antje Weithaas** *vn* <sup>a</sup>**Marie-Elisabeth Hecker** *vc*

**Martin Helmchen** *pf* **Deutsches Symphonie-**

**Orchester Berlin / Andrew Manze**

Alpha (F) ALPHA642 (70' • DDD)



Unless a *Choral Fantasy* is waiting in the wings, this new disc rounds

out Martin Helmchen's collaboration with Andrew Manze and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin in the mature piano concertante works of Beethoven. The Second and Fifth Concertos were released in October last year (12/19) and the First and Fourth this spring (9/20).

Every encounter with the incomparable Andrew Manze seems to bring surprising new insights; fortunate the soloist who can rely on his imaginative direction. In the C minor Concerto, he evokes a Beethoven who is neither angry nor brutal but the confident young master unashamed of casting a glance over his shoulder at Mozart's C minor Concerto, K491. Manze and his orchestra create the *mise en scène* into which Helmchen strides easily, exercising both heroic gestures and poetic eloquence.

Helmchen is extraordinarily adept at creating vivid contrasts between areas of repose and eruptions of energy. Without being fussy, he is ever on the lookout for the telling detail, be it in phrasing or passagework. His trills are wonderfully varied and always suited to their rhetorical context. If it is axiomatic to claim that Beethoven players stand or fall on the strength of their slow movements, in the hallowed climes of the *Largo* Helmchen must be declared a champion. The Rondo is fleet, fiery without being driven, emerging in a blaze of clarity. Drawing on rich and varied pianistic resources, and with a disarming sincerity of utterance, Helmchen holds the attention from beginning to end.

For the Triple Concerto, Helmchen is joined by two of his regular chamber music partners, violinist Antje Weithaas and cellist Marie-Elisabeth Hecker. The interaction and blending of their distinctive sounds – Weithaas's angelic purity, Hecker's trenchant fruitiness and Helmchen's silvery focus – create something of a sonic banquet. But it is the hand-in-glove ensemble of the three that is likely to win new fans for this ignored stepchild of Beethoven's concertos. Detractors have called the piece a piano





Warmth and finesse: the Kanneh-Mason clan bring fantasy and joy to Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals* – see review on page 60

trio with backup. That said, if Manze and his Berliners aren't cast as the forceful antagonists they were in the C minor Concerto, their hearty presence provides both coalescence and stimulus in this splendid performance. It's difficult to think of another reading of the Polish Rondo that combines haughty elegance and jovial high spirits in happier symbiosis.

Patrick Rucker

## Beethoven · Ferré · Sollima

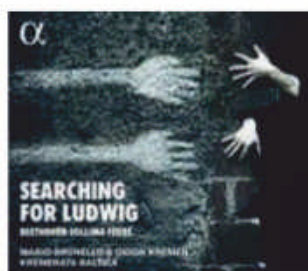
'Searching for Ludwig'

**Beethoven** String Quartets – No 14, Op 131<sup>a</sup>; No 16, Op 135<sup>b</sup> **Ferré** 'Muss es sein? Es muss sein!'<sup>c</sup> **Sollima** Note sconte<sup>b</sup>

**Kremerata Baltica** / <sup>b</sup>Mario Brunello <sup>c</sup>vc,

<sup>a</sup>Gidon Kremer <sup>vn</sup>

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA660 (79' • DDD)



Unlike Leonard Bernstein's famous recording of these same two late Beethoven quartets with the strings of the Vienna Philharmonic (DG, 11/92) –

titanic, emotionally acute interpretations indelibly stamped with that conductor's imprint – the Kremerata Baltica act more as an augmented quartet, retaining a sense of intimacy that's still very much in the realm of chamber music. Indeed, Gidon Kremer begins Op 131 with a solo quartet, and it's not until a minute or so into the fugue that the rest of the ensemble slips in, so that the transformation is accomplished with what seems like a sleight of hand. And yet, while Kremer's relatively slender ensemble is no match for the luxuriousness of the VPO's string section, the added weight pays rich dividends, particularly in the dark, saturated colours of the finale. I wish the cellos (and basses) made more of the humorous *sforzandos* in the fourth movement (try starting at 6'00"), but honestly that's nitpicking.

As for Op 135, led here by cellist Mario Brunello, I have only superlatives, for his is a performance as exquisite in its transparency as it is for its attention to detail. Listen near the end of the first movement (starting at 6'13"), for example, to how the musicians give varied expression to a series of identically notated

ornaments (a pair of demisemiquaver grace notes): gentle and singing at first, and then aggressively snappy. Or to how modern the opening of the finale (and its various iterations) sounds when dug into with such chiselled concentration.

Heard in its 1976 original, French singer-songwriter Léo Ferré's '*Muss es sein?*' exudes the musty perfume of a period piece – outraged declamation over a pleasantly sweet chord progression – but Valter Sivilotti's arrangement for solo cello, strings and percussion amplifies the frictions, making it an aptly effective prelude to this programme. And if Giovanni Sollima's musings on fragments from the Biamonti catalogue of Beethoven's works is considerably less electric, it provides a welcome respite between the intense demands of the two quartets. Not to be missed.

Andrew Farach-Colton

## Ben-Haim

Symphony No 1. Pan, Op 17<sup>a</sup>.

Pastorale variée, Op 31<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Claudia Barainsky <sup>sop</sup> <sup>b</sup>John Bradbury <sup>cl</sup>

**BBC Philharmonic Orchestra** / Omer Meir Wellber  
Chandos Ⓢ CHAN20169 (61' • DDD • T/t)



# GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

## BEETHOVEN PIANO CONCERTOS

**Jed Distler** fills in some gaps among this year's bumper crop of Beethoven piano concerto releases and uncovers some gems



All-embracing musicianship: Inon Barnatan brings exhilarating pianism to his Beethoven concerto cycle

Just when you thought *Gramophone* had covered every new Beethoven piano concerto cycle imaginable for the composer's 250th-anniversary year, here are four that fell between the cracks until now, along with a few singleton discs for good measure.

According to Signum's press release for **Elizabeth Sombart's** Royal Philharmonic cycle, the performers 'examine each concerto in sublime detail, demonstrating the various contrasts of each piece in an elegant and passionate fashion'. I find nothing elegant or sublime about Sombart's uneven articulation and rhythmic control in nearly every

unaccompanied passage. Cases in point: her flattening out the dotted rhythms of the second theme of the Second Concerto's Rondo, her poorly focused interaction between hands at the outset of No 3's finale or her blurry navigation of the exuberant *Emperor* Rondo's opening. Moreover, she rarely gives form to her undeniably sensitive impulses, such as in No 1's *Largo*, where myriad ritards and hesitations cause phrases to fall apart, compounded by an impossibly slow basic tempo. By way of comparison, Daniel Barenboim's recording with Otto Klemperer is similarly protracted, yet his solo playing conveys a stronger through

line, with better control of the long trills. Pierre Vallet and the RPO manage to follow Sombart's tempo fluctuations hand in glove (abetted by a strong woodwind presence), betraying an occasional imprecise pickup or tenuously synchronised figuration. Sombart's pianism reveals much more focus and discipline in the Triple Concerto, flanked by her excellent co-soloists, violinist Duncan Riddell and cellist Richard Harwood.

Turn 180 degrees to genuinely solid and tasteful pianism from **Jayson Gillham**. His Apollonian vantage point evokes past masters such as Walter Gieseking, Robert Casadesu and Solomon, who also favoured straightforward clarity, classical reserve and a generally symmetrical approach, while effecting subtle gradations of tone and nuance within a limited dynamic scope. You may miss Leon Fleisher's angularity or Stewart Goodyear's exuberance, yet Gillham's cultivation and taste are never in doubt. If anything, his sonority and expressive palette open up more in the last three concertos; note the pleading intensity he brings to No 4's first-movement development section plus the cadenza's ear-catching levels of light and shade, and a bracingly witty spin through the *Emperor* Rondo. But the diffuse sonic ambience often skews the balances and undermines power in loud orchestral passages, while conductor Nicholas Carter favours minimum string vibrato, along with those exaggerated and mannered diminuendos in name of 'authenticity' that too many conductors deem fitting. Consequently, the violins often fade into the mix when you expect them to project.

Collectors familiar with Martin Haselböck's Beethoven symphony cycle with the Wiener Akademie will find the same intelligent pacing and insightful details throughout their concerto survey. The conductor consistently elicits pungent, brash, colourful and texturally diverse sonorities from his musicians, as opposed to the undernourished, mechanical or briskly faceless playing one hears from certain period ensembles in these works. **Gottlieb Wallisch's** forthright and meticulous fortepiano mastery fits perfectly into the picture, so to speak. He's one of the few soloists on disc (along with Claudio Arrau) who creates a grace-note effect in the First Concerto Rondo's main theme simply by observing Beethoven's slurs. He gives subtle emphasis and thrust to the left-hand accompaniment in No 2's first movement (ie at 4'51"), although some of the soloist's



rounded-off phrasing and baroque-ish arpeggiations in No 3 impart an almost Rococo sensibility to what should be forward-thinking music. But Nos 4 and No 5 convey more gravitas and flexibility than in competing fortepiano editions, while the delightful Rondo in B flat (Beethoven's original ending for No 2) is both scampering and spacious at the same time. Wallisch and Haselböck contribute to the catalogue a particularly vibrant and committed edition of the Violin Concerto's piano arrangement, Op 61*a*, where the first-movement cadenza's famous keyboard/timpani dialogue turns into a heated, volatile debate.

However, **Inon Barnatan**, Alan Gilbert and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields stand out for all-embracing musicianship, finesse of execution and stylistic perception. Under Gilbert's watch, ensemble attacks, releases and internal balances prove more precise and refined than in this orchestra's recent live Beethoven cycle led from the keyboard by Jan Lisiecki (DG, 11/19); compare, for example, Gilbert's textural contouring in the central fugal episode of the Third Concerto's Rondo next to Lisiecki's more generalised reading and you'll hear what I mean.

What is more, Barnatan's incisive and invigorating solo work breathes fresh life into thrice-familiar music. A sense of direction consistently informs the pianist's clipped articulation of fast runs and roulades, which never sound glib or exaggerated, along with his astute linear awareness. He also proves more willing than Sombart to step back and accompany when necessary, as in the development section of No 4's first movement. Indeed, the buoyant, chamber-like aesthetic characterising the solo concerto readings proves even more revelatory in the Triple Concerto, where the effortlessly fluid interaction between soloists and orchestra evokes a multi-level concerto grosso. The *Choral Fantasy*'s disparate and arguably discontinuous elements coalesce in perfect perspective, even if I prefer Leif Ove Andsnes's brisker and brasher take on the variations (Sony, A/14). Among modern-instrument Op 61*a* recordings, I still favour the Boris Berevovsky/Thomas Dausgaard edition's leaner, more headlong outer movements, yet Barnatan's warm, singing tone almost makes you forget the original violin part.

I admired **Olivier Cavé**'s firm, slightly sec way with Beethoven's First Piano

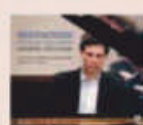
Sonata (5/18), and his crystalline touch and poised yet spirited classicism lend interest and distinction to the first two concertos. Under Patrick Hahn's leadership, the Kammerakademie Potsdam display plenty of power and presence when needed; note the seamless dovetailing of unaccompanied solo and orchestral *tutti* passages, with nary a loose end. Yet again, those mannered diminuendos ...

Apparently **Eugene Albulescu** led the Orchestra of Friends from the piano in Beethoven's First and Fifth concertos with a limited amount of recording time available. You'd never know it, aside from shaky coordination between the pianist and horns at the crucial *fortissimo* descending scales leading into No 1's first-movement recapitulation. Otherwise, the music sounds expertly rehearsed and assimilated. Albulescu's engaging and lively pianism simply delights, and the first-desk woodwinds respond characterfully in turn. I have but two bones to pick regarding their *Emperor*. One is in how the pianist unduly dominates in the first-movement development section's scale exchanges. The other concerns Albulescu's pretentious distensions of phrase (bar 65 and elsewhere) in the Rondo finale, which smack more of *molto* than *poco ritard*. In sum, make room for Barnatan/Gilbert in your permanent library, pass over Sombart, and at least sample the others. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**Beethoven** Piano Concertos, etc  
Sombart; RPO / Vallet  
Signum (M) (3) SIGCD657



**Beethoven** Piano Concertos  
Gillham; Adelaide SO / Carter  
ABC Classics (M) (3) ABC481 8533



**Beethoven** Piano Concertos, etc  
Wallisch; Wiener Akademie /  
Haselböck CPO (F) (3) CPO555 329-2



**Beethoven** Piano Concertos, etc  
Barnatan; ASMF / Gilbert  
Pentatone (F) (3) PTC5186 817/824



**Beethoven** Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2  
Cavé; Potsdam Chbr Acad / Hahn  
Alpha (F) ALPHA649



**Beethoven** Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 5  
Albulescu; Orch of Friends  
AMP (F) AMPA22



It's good to see the music of the Munich-born Israeli composer Paul Ben-Haim

receiving increasing attention from record companies. The Symphony No 1 and *Pastorale variée* have been recorded before but this is the first appearance of the tone poem *Pan* for soprano and orchestra, completed in 1931 while Ben-Haim was still living in Germany. This evocative and ravishing setting of a text by the German poet Heinrich Lautensack makes a strong impression. There are echoes of works such as Ravel's *Shéhérazade* and Zemlinsky's *Lyric Symphony* in the writing, but the word-setting is sensitive, the scoring sumptuous and the melodic inspiration inspired. It's difficult to imagine the work receiving a more sympathetic and impassioned performance than this one by Claudia Barainsky and Omer Meir Wellber.

The First Symphony was composed for the newly formed Palestine Symphony Orchestra in 1939-40 and, as the composer acknowledged, was influenced by the events in Europe and beyond at that time. The tempestuous and dramatic outer movements evoke a warlike mood, the sound of the snare drum prominent in both, and even the serene opening of the slow movement, inspired by Jewish prayer melodies, soon develops into a tumultuous climax. Wellber's performance is notably tauter than Israel Yinon's 2008 recording for CPO and communicates the restless energy of the piece extremely well.

The *Pastorale variée* of 1945 is an arrangement for clarinet, strings and harps of the final movement of Ben-Haim's earlier Quintet for clarinet and string quintet. The mood is for the most part gentle and wistful, although the fifth and penultimate movement is a lively dance which incorporates elements of Arab music and other local influences. Clarinetist John Bradbury gives an excellent performance of this poetic and moving work.

There's a slight edge to the recording of the symphony in louder passages but fortunately this is not an issue in *Pan* and *Pastorale variée*. The detailed and informative booklet note by the composer and academic Michael Wolpe is one of the best I've ever read. Altogether, a very worthwhile and rewarding release.

**Christian Hoskins**

*Symphony No 1 – selected comparison:*

NDR Rad Philh, Hanover; Yinon (CPO) CPO777 417-2



Piano Trio  
Voice  
Wind Quintet  
Oboe  
Trumpet  
Piano  
Percussion  
Viola  
Clarinete  
Flute  
Violoncello  
Bassoon  
Trombone  
Harp  
French Horn  
Piano Duo  
String Quartet  
Violin  
Double Bass  
Organ  
Guitar

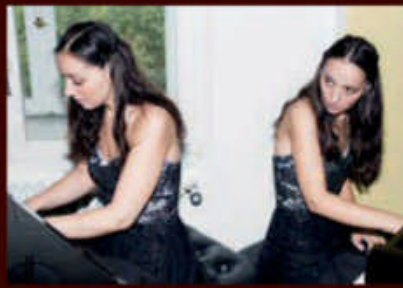
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## Clyne

'Mythologies'

Masquerade<sup>a</sup>. Night Ferry<sup>b</sup>. <<rewind<<<sup>c</sup>.

This Midnight Hour<sup>d</sup>. The Seamstress<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Irene Buckley voice <sup>e</sup>Jennifer Koh vn

BBC Symphony Orchestra / <sup>a</sup>Marin Alsop,

<sup>b</sup>Andrew Litton, <sup>de</sup>Sakari Oramo, <sup>c</sup>André de Ridder

Avie © AV2434 (67' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Barbican Hall, London,

<sup>c</sup>May 7, 2011, <sup>b</sup>January 11, 2013, <sup>e</sup>January 15, 2016,

<sup>d</sup>March 21, 2018; <sup>a</sup>Royal Albert Hall, London,

September 7, 2013



Mark Pullinger wrote movingly of Anna Clyne's cello concerto *DANCE*

(2019) in the August issue, concluding that it 'should make many friends'. So, too, will this all-Clyne release from Avie, featuring five vibrant, exuberantly scored and appealing works. Composed over the past 15 years, the pieces are arranged not in chronological order but in an engrossingly musical sequence not unlike that of a concert. At its heart is another concerto, for violin, *The Seamstress* (2014). On her website, the composer describes this not so much as a concerto but as 'an imaginary one-act ballet' where the title character's mind wanders into a series of tales ranging 'from love to despair, and that combine memory with fantasy'. It is beautifully played by Jennifer Koh (for whom it was written) and given an extra dimension by the incursion of Irene Buckley's whispered declamation of the Yeats verse that inspired it.

The 'overture' is the bracing *Masquerade*, written for the 2013 Last Night of the Proms. This would seem to be that terrific performance, directed by Marin Alsop (a shame the applause is omitted). At a snip under five minutes in length, *Masquerade* is the shortest composition here, briefer even than the concluding, irresistible toccata <<rewind<< (2005). The complex, volatile *Night Ferry* (2012) was commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as a companion piece to works by Schubert and inspired by that composer's 'violent mood swings' and 'bursts of manic creativity'.

To my mind the most impressive piece here is *This Midnight Hour* (2015), inspired by poems by Baudelaire and Juan Ramón Jiménez, compact, compelling and tautly directed by Oramo. Irrespective of the conductors, it is the BBC Symphony Orchestra who shine throughout, with superbly mastered sound (by Jody Elff). Another winner from Avie. **Guy Rickards**

## Delibes

'Ballet Suites'

*Coppélia*, ou La fille aux yeux d'émail; La source, ou Naïla; *Sylvia*, ou La nymphe de Diane – suites (compiled by Neeme Järvi)

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Neeme Järvi

Chandos © CHSA5257 (83' • DDD/DSD)



'*Swan Lake* is mere rubbish in comparison with *Sylvia*', Tchaikovsky

wrote to Nadezhda von Meck in 1877, having just heard Delibes's ballet in Vienna. No one in their right mind would nowadays agree with him but his remark, though coloured, one suspects, by *Swan Lake*'s recent failure, is also a genuine acknowledgement of the French composer's brilliance. Among the most inventive of 19th-century dance scores, *La source* (1866, co-written with Ludwig Minkus), *Coppélia* (1870) and *Sylvia* (1876) set new standards for ballet music, paving the way for much that came in their wake. Their popularity, that of *Coppélia* in particular, means we often overestimate both their originality and their importance.

Neeme Järvi and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra offer a generous selection from all three. The compilation of the suites is attributed to Järvi himself, though the extracts from *Sylvia* and *Coppélia*, roughly adhering to the outline of the ballet's narratives, more or less follow the concert digests from Delibes's lifetime, and which may or may not have been his own. Järvi's suite from *La source* – to which Delibes contributed the second act and the first scene of the third – dispenses with the original ordering and narrative, a variant on the Ondine story, set in India, but proves remarkably effective in its own right.

Järvi's affection for this music is very much apparent from the warmth with which he conducts it and the way he carefully emphasises the imaginative subtleties of Delibes's orchestration. There's refined passion as well as grandeur in the *Sylvia* pas de deux, its concertante violin solo exquisitely played by RSNO leader Sharon Roffman, while the climactic galop (the Snowflakes from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, one notices, take their cue from the woodwind-writing here) has terrific élan. Järvi judges *La source*'s mix of orientalism and elegance wonderfully well, while the Slavonic local colour of *Coppélia* is beautifully brought out: the Mazurka has an infectious energy, while the 'Thème slave varié' – ringing changes on what

Delibes thought was a folk song, but is actually by Moniuszko – is most engagingly done.

Some, I suspect, would prefer a slightly slower tempo and greater weight in the strings in the slow section of the *Coppélia* Czardas, though the lilt in the rhythm here is unquestionably beguiling. And Järvi's slightly driven way with the *Sylvia* 'Les Chasseresses', exciting in itself, doesn't quite achieve the proud exultation of Anatole Fistoulari in his LSO recording of the complete work (Mercury, 8/59). The RNSO are on fine form here, though, with some beautifully poised woodwind solos, clear, precise brass and a warm sheen in the strings, particularly in those expansive cello melodies of which Delibes was clearly fond. It's a lovely album, and superbly recorded, too. **Tim Ashley**

## Haydn

Symphony No 100, 'Military'.

Missa in angustiiis, 'Nelson Mass', HobXXII:11<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Mary Bevan sop <sup>a</sup>Catherine Wyn-Rogers mez

<sup>a</sup>Jeremy Budd ten <sup>a</sup>Sumner Thompson bar

Handel and Haydn Society / Harry Christophers

Coro © COR16181 (65' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston,

January 24 & 26, 2020



Harry Christophers and the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston present a

neatly turned-out *Military* Symphony, closer to the urbanity of Colin Davis than the rawer edges of Eugen Jochum or, on original instruments, the speedier Marc Minkowski. It's a performance that impresses rather than exhilarates – until, that is, the Turkish percussion make their entrance in the slow movement. As well as the prescribed bass drum, cymbal and triangle there's a Turkish crescent or jingling Johnny, which jingles deliciously both here and in the finale. The instruments and the reasoning behind their selection is intriguingly discussed in the booklet: this being a performance on period instruments, we learn, for example, that the cymbals are slightly antique Zildjians – not actually from the 18th century but wrought using the same secret process discovered by Avedis Zildjian in 1623. It's a terrific sound that gives most other *Military* Symphonies a run for their money.

The coupling in concert and on disc is the best-known of Haydn's Masses, the so-called *Nelson*, with a conspicuously well-drilled chorus, brimming with confidence



and never for a moment caught out by Haydn's challenging writing. The soloists are largely British, presided over by the imperious soprano of Mary Bevan; the only American, Sumner Thompson, is noticeably a baritone rather than a bass, lacking the last ounce of strength in the lower range. Mezzo Catherine Wyn-Rogers comes adrift from the pulse briefly in the 'Agnus Dei'. Nevertheless, this is an intensely likeable performance, one that easily rivals the granitic Pinnock or Gardiner and comes close to matching Hickox's recording, in which the choral, orchestral and soloistic stars align for something just a little extra special.

**David Threasher**

*Symphony No 100 – selected comparison:*

*Musiciens du Louvre, Minkowski (9/10) (NAIV) V5176*

*Nelson Mass – selected comparisons:*

*Pinnock (2/88) (ARCH) ➔ 423 097-2AH*

*Hickox (9/99) (CHAN) CHAN0640 or CHAN0734*

*Gardiner (1/03) (PHIL) 470 286-2PH or*

*(DECC) 478 7828DC8*

## Hindemith

'Kammermusik, Vol 2'

Kammermusiken - No 4, Op 36 No 3<sup>a</sup>; No 5, Op 36 No 4<sup>b</sup>; No 6, Op 46 No 1<sup>c</sup>; No 7, Op 46 No 2<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Stephen Waarts <sup>vn</sup> <sup>b</sup>Timothy Ridout <sup>va</sup> <sup>c</sup>Ziyu Shen <sup>va d'amore</sup> <sup>d</sup>Christian Schmitt <sup>org</sup> Kronberg

Academy Soloists; Schleswig-Holstein Festival

Orchestra / Christoph Eschenbach

Ondine Ⓢ ODE1357-2 (73' • DDD)



Unlike the three concertos on the first volume of Eschenbach's survey (7/20), those on its successor, Nos 4-7, tend to be issued mostly in complete sets of the *Kammermusiken*. As a consequence, they focus on the chamber-musical qualities of the music, albeit that the ensembles tend to be larger than earlier concertos. The exception to the rule is No 5, Op 36 No 4, which does appear in a number of 'complete viola concertos' issues. The best of these are Lawrence Power's and Tabea Zimmermann's; but Timothy Ridout – recently announced as the UK Critics' Circle's Young Instrumentalist of the Year for 2019 – provides a beautifully smooth-toned performance.

As in Vol 1, Eschenbach relishes the music's wild iconoclasm. Tempos are again lively and throughout he draws marvellous playing from the Kronberg Academy strings and Schleswig-Holstein Festival Orchestra's winds (the trumpet not least!) and percussion. True, the start of the violin concerto, *Kammermusik* No 4, lacks the

bite that both Chailly and Abbado achieved, but that is a minor blip and Stephen Waarts proves a most winning soloist. Astonishingly, the only rival version not in a complete survey is Michael Guttman's with José Serebrier. I first encountered the work in a vibrant account by Oistrakh, long deleted. Curiously, the viola d'amore concerto has more accounts listed by Presto Classical.

I have not encountered Ziyu Shen before as a viola player – or viola d'amore player – this may even be her first recording. She gives a fine account of this rarest of concertos, bringing a freshness to the sound that is just as beguiling as her rivals Blume and Christ, helped immeasurably by Ondine's crystal-clear recording. The organ concerto fares well, too, nimbly played by Christian Schmitt. This really is the *Kammermusiken* for the 2020s.

**Guy Rickards**

*Selected comparison – coupled as above:*

*Kulka, Kashkashian, Blume, van Doeselaar, RCO, Chailly*

*(11/92<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 473 722-2DF2*

*Blacher, Christ, Marshall, BPO, Abbado*

*(5/00<sup>R</sup>) (EMI) 397711-2*

*Kammermusik No 4 – selected comparison:*

*Guttman, Philb Orch, Serebrier (3/96) (ASV) CDDCA945*

*Kammermusik No 5 – selected comparisons:*

*Power, BBC Scottish SO, Atherton*

*(3/11) (HYPE) CDA67774*

*T Zimmermann, DSO Berlin, Graf*

*(A/13) (MYR) MYR010*

## Messiaen

Turangalila-Symphonie

Tamara Stefanovich *pf* Thomas Bloch *ondes*

*martenot* Mannheim National Theatre Orchestra /

Alexander Soddy

Oehms Ⓢ OC472 (78' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Mozartsaal, Rosengarten

Mannheim, November 11 & 12, 2019



The *Turangalila* discography is now so extensive that any addition needs to offer something distinctive. Recorded live in Mannheim, this newcomer has much going for it and not least, in Tamara Stefanovich, a pianist doing full justice to the intricacy of music whose tumultuous cadenza-like passages are rendered with assurance. More advantageously balanced than with Antoni Wit (11/00), Thomas Bloch brings out the fantasy but also spectral ambiguity of the writing for ondes martenot – never too unduly prominent as has latterly become the norm.

While not quite in the first league, the Mannheim forces respond with evident

dexterity and incisiveness to Alexander Soddy's alert direction in a well-conceived and cohesive reading, lacking the last degree of sensuousness in the two 'Chants d'amour' or malevolence in the three 'Turangalila' movements, though with an airy rapture making this 'Jardin du sommeil d'amour' among the finest, and with the extensive thematic interplay of 'Développement d'amour' (rightly) made the audible culmination of the overall design. The remaining three movements are expertly done but lack the visceral impact such uninhibited music requires.

With its clear though slightly recessed sound (best played at a high volume) and annotations that are no more than adequate, this new release is preferable to Hannu Lintu's bracing if uniform astringency and is at least the equal of Juanjo Mena, whose excitability frequently verges on overkill. Seiji Ozawa's pioneering version remains the best option to hear Yvonne and Jeanne Loriod in their fabled partnership, with the sheer electricity of Simon Rattle (who revisited the piece in Berlin and will surely do so again in London) and rigorous while never inflexible accuracy of Kent Nagano still leading the field. Not quite a front runner, Soddy's disciplined and cumulative approach is worth hearing and will likely prove one to live with.

**Richard Whitehouse**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Toronto SO, Ozawa (9/68<sup>R</sup>) (RCA) 82876 59418-2*

*CBSO, Rattle (12/87<sup>R</sup>) (EMI/WARN) 586525-2*

*BPO, Nagano (9/01) (TELD/WARN) 8573 82043-2*

*Bergen PO, Mena (10/12) (HYPE) CDA67816*

*Finnish RSO, Lintu (9/14) (ONDI) ODE1251-5*

## Moszkowski

'Orchestral Music, Vol 2'

Suites - No 2, Op 47; No 3, Op 79

Sinfonia Varsovia / Ian Hobson

Toccata Classics Ⓢ TOCC0557 (68' • DDD)



Moszkowski is best known for his myriad short piano pieces. Great pianists of the past from Rachmaninov to Horowitz had at least one of them in their repertoire. But what of his orchestral works? Apart from his *Spanish Dances*, Op 12 (orchestrated by his friend Philipp Scharwenka), *From Foreign Lands*, the bafflingly under-played Violin Concerto and Piano Concerto in E major, little has been recorded.

Martin Anderson's ever-enterprising Toccata Classics last year gave us the



first-ever recording of Moszkowski's extraordinary four-movement tone poem *Johanna d'Arc*, Op 19 (1875-76) depicting the life, death and transfiguration of the heroine of Schiller's play *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*. Much of the first movement (23 minutes in length) sounds like a prescient Hollywood film score. Its last movement was an unlikely but almost certain influence on Richard Strauss's *Tod und Verklärung*.

Those who know the Moszkowski concertos will recognise the composer's autograph in the musical textures of this work and the two Orchestral Suites that feature on Vol 2. Ian Hobson, who won the 1981 Leeds International Piano Competition, once again acts as both producer and conductor, leading the Sinfonia Varsovia in performances of winning verve and character.

For this listener, the *Deuxième Suite*, Op 47 (1890, 41 minutes in duration), has the feeling of six separate works for orchestra simply bundled together for publication, emphasised by the opening Preludio and Fuga movements having a brief part for organ that never returns (as expected) for the final triumphant Marcia. Notwithstanding, all six are blessed with Moszkowski's unstoppable flow of melody: the *Larghetto* fourth movement is simply gorgeous while the second subject of the Marcia, as Martin Eastick observes in his superb booklet essay, takes on an Elgarian twist reminiscent of *Cockaigne* 'still 10 years away'.

The *Troisième Suite* (from 1908), here receiving its first digital recording, will be familiar to collectors who got to know it in the 1970s through a subscription-issue LP of the Louisville Orchestra, where it appeared alongside works by Reger, Bizet and Nápravník. I cannot understand why this tuneful, expertly crafted, undemanding score is hardly known. Is it because it falls between two stools, neither in the Austro-German symphonic mould nor strictly 'light classical' – though there are passages in the first and last of its four movements that could easily be mistaken for Eric Coates and occasionally Arthur Sullivan? Whatever, it dances along so merrily that, while some might affect a sniffy resistance, it defies you not to be its friend.

Hopefully this series will continue and bring us something of the ballet *Laurin*, opera *Boabdil* and further examples of Moszkowski's woefully neglected orchestral music.

Jeremy Nicholas

## Pärt

*Fratres*<sup>a</sup>. Für Alina. Für Anna Maria. *Lamentate*<sup>b</sup>. *Pari intervallo*. Variationen zur Gesendung von Arinuschka. Vater unser

Onutė Gražinytė *pf* with <sup>a</sup>Edward King *vc*

<sup>b</sup>Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra /

Modestas Pitrenas

Accentus ⑤ ACC30512 (70' • DDD)



This is a wondrously thought-provoking anthology of Pärt's work. It begins with

the non-concerto for piano and orchestra *Lamentate*, the composer's response to Anish Kapoor's sculpture *Marsyas* in Tate Modern. It's a work that took me some time to appreciate, but its structure of 10 short segments can be seen as a kind of (re-)traversal of Pärt's career as a composer, a reflection on what he had achieved or aimed to achieve up to that point. He thus describes the piece, reflecting on the impact that the sculpture had on him, as a 'Lamento, not for the dead, but for the living, who have a hard time dealing with the suffering in the world'.

Seen thus, *Lamentate* is exactly what it sets out to be, and, in a performance as attuned to its internal resonance as this, is profoundly moving. The remarkable psychological precision of the sparely scored fifth section, for example ('Solitudine – stato d'animo'), sends shivers up one's spine, and soloist Onutė Gražinytė understands this absolutely. It is not only a question of stasis, but of a profound understanding of the spiritual state of quietude that allows the composer to give a piece for such large forces, designed for the concert hall, such a quiet, slowly pulsing heart.

Gražinytė's understanding of what Pärt is about is also clearly evident in the remainder of the album, comprising works for solo piano (not least the seminal *Für Alina*), piano and cello, and piano and voice, in which she gives voice to the notational 'whiteness' of the composer's scores with what I have long argued is an absolutely necessary sophistication, paradoxically finding therein their depth. This performance of *Fratres*, with cellist Edward King, is one of the best I have ever heard, balancing vertiginously on the tightrope of delicacy and power. The album ends, entirely appropriately, with Pärt's German-language setting of the Lord's Prayer, sung by Gražinytė, who accompanies herself. You cannot buy that kind of innocent beauty but you can, and should, buy this disc. **Ivan Moody**

## Prokofiev

Symphonies – No 1, 'Classical', Op 25;

No 2, Op 40; No 3, Op 44

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Litton

BIS ⑤ BIS2174 (87' • DDD/DSD)



This is the final instalment of Andrew Litton's Prokofiev symphony cycle,

one of the most sonically sophisticated in the lists. Only don't look to Bergen for the raw sonorities associated with those old Prokofiev LPs emanating from communist Russia. For all that his sequence opts for the later, Soviet incarnation of the Fourth, Litton is closer to Marin Alsop in rendering this music as full-blooded mainstream fare.

In the ubiquitous *Classical* Symphony Litton is out-sparkled by Thomas Søndergård's recent account. Marshalling what sounds like a bigger band, the American conductor too narrowly skirts clumsiness in his self-consciously moulded Gavotte. That said, it was generous indeed to give us three symphonies. Søndergård couples the First and Fifth while Pentatone present Vladimir Jurowski in the Second and Third alone. One wonders whether BIS's extended-play physical product might bamboozle older systems.

Towards the end of his life Prokofiev intended to recast the two-movement Second, having long since retreated from the modernist aesthetic exemplified by its initial 12 minutes of 'iron and steel'. Litton unearths unsuspected textural subtleties there and conveys real affection for the subsequent theme and variations. Prokofiev's lovely melody makes a quite different impression under Jurowski, chaste even when fleshed out, piano figuration to the fore, whereas Litton can be positively schmaltzy, letting the strings dominate. This is not to say that he lacks sensitivity or fails to set teeth on edge (in a good way) in the raucous, climactic variation. In truth neither goes for maximal animal excitement.

Litton's Third is noticeably tauter than Jurowski's and some will count that a plus in what purports to be a symphony rather than a suite: the material derives from the occult opera *The Fiery Angel*. The warm immediacy of the interpretation worked for me, but listeners prioritising creepy atmospherics and timbral specificity will probably prefer Jurowski, fronting the contemporary incarnation of Evgeny Svetlanov's old orchestra.





Consummate athleticism: Daniil Trifonov gives exciting accounts of concertos by Prokofiev and Scriabin and a smattering of demanding solo works

Enhanced by apposite, unsensational artwork, the present issue takes its place at or near the top of a growing pile. The surround sound, a shade brighter than ideal, is a vast improvement on those shouty Soviet sound carriers. Even Neeme Järvi's much-praised 1980s Prokofiev now feels like a bridge between sonic worlds.

**David Gutman**

*Symphony No 1 – selected comparison:*

RSNO, Söndergård (5/20) (LINN) CKD611

*Symphonies Nos 2 and 3 – selected comparison:*

St Academic SO of Russia, Jurovski

(2/18) (PENT) PTC5186 624

*Symphonies Nos 1-3 – selected comparison:*

RSNO, N Järvi (12/08) (CHAN) CHAN10500

## Prokofiev • Scriabin • Stravinsky

'Silver Age'

**Prokofiev** Cinderella – Three Pieces, Op 95.

Gavotte, Op 95 No 2. Piano Concerto No 2,

Op 16<sup>a</sup>. Piano Sonata No 8, Op 84.

Sarcasms, Op 17 **Scriabin** Piano Concerto,

Op 20<sup>a</sup> **Stravinsky** The Firebird – Suite

(transcr Agosti). Serenade in A.

Trois Mouvements de Pétrouchka

**Daniil Trifonov** *pf*

<sup>a</sup>Mariinsky Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

DG (M) (2) 483 5331 (145' • DDD)



Daniil Trifonov rightly describes Russia's Silver Age as 'an increasingly

fractured social, political and intellectual environment – a cocktail of different artistic expressions, in agitated interaction'. Even so, it's a bit of a stretch to press Stravinsky's 1925 Serenade into an era generally defined as having been broken off by the 1917 Revolution. And that stretch goes to breaking point with Prokofiev's Eighth Sonata, composed in the 1940s. I suppose 'Five Russian blockbusters and some interludes', though more accurate, wouldn't have the same ring to it.

Titles aside, these are two

exceptional discs in many ways.

The Scriabin Concerto seems to me particularly successful, because Trifonov has a fine instinct for its ebb and flow of moods and for just how much dreamy dalliance he can afford without tipping over into self-indulgence. Prokofiev's monstrously demanding Second Concerto sees him completely in his element so far as hyper-virtuosity

is concerned: I doubt whether the bustling, motoric second movement or the helter-skelter outer sections of the finale have been more daringly or excitingly driven, and if parts of the first and third movements feel reined in to the point of being laboured, there are (arguably) legitimate character-driven reasons for this approach.

With the Eighth Sonata I have more concerns. In general Trifonov has difficulty keeping his inner agitation in check. When the central phase of the first movement demands ruthless control of tempo he cannot resist pressing forwards, and while his finale is superbly virtuoso it risks confusing means with ends – the virtuosity should surely be in the service of a vision of the work as a wartime epic, as it is with Richter (who is admittedly *hors concours*). Even the *Petrushka* movements and Agosti's *Firebird* transcription – consummately athletic though the playing undoubtedly is – occasionally see the music pressed into the service of Trifonov's virtuosity, rather than the more truly virtuous vice versa. The cure for this would be to learn from orchestral performances not only as stimuli towards original pianistic colourings but also as models



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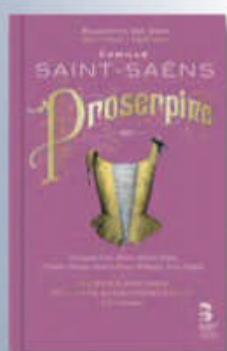
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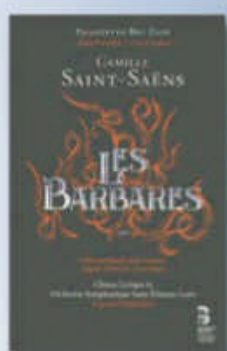
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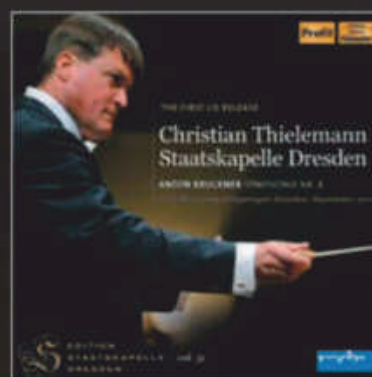
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for continuity and dramatic pacing (see Pollini's *Petrushka* for a shining example).

Trifonov's nervous temperament comes more completely into its own in Prokofiev's *Sarcasms*, which can not only stand but positively invite his highly capricious treatment. In Stravinsky's *Serenade*, where Trifonov is roughly at the polar opposite to the composer's own poker-faced recording, it could be argued that his bigger-boned first movement, his unscheduled *precipitato* at the end of the Rondoletto and his *agitato* rather than the marked *teneramente* in the finale Cadenza are not entirely at odds with the music.

Something of a mixed bag, then, with a big 'wow!' factor balanced by some moments of 'whoa!'. **David Fanning**

## Saint-Saëns

**Saint-Saëns** Carnival of the Animals<sup>a</sup>

**Marley** Redemption Song **Morpurgo**

**Grandpa Christmas**<sup>b</sup> (featuring music by Bartók, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Grieg, Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and Whitacre)

<sup>a</sup>Adam Walker *fl* <sup>a</sup>Mark Simpson *cl* **Aminata**

**Kanneh-Mason, Braimah Kanneh-Mason,**

<sup>a</sup>Ayla Sahin *vns* <sup>a</sup>Timothy Ridout *va* **Sheku**

**Kanneh-Mason** *vc* **Mariatu Kanneh-Mason** *vc*, <sup>b</sup>*narr*

<sup>a</sup>Toby Hughes *db* **Isata Kanneh-Mason, Jeneba**

**Kanneh-Mason, Konya Kanneh-Mason** *pf* <sup>a</sup>Adrian

**Spillett** *xylo* <sup>a</sup>Alasdair Malloy *glass harmonica*

<sup>a</sup>Olivia Colman, <sup>ab</sup>Michael Morpurgo *narrs*

Decca © 485 1156 (64' • DDD)



If you're looking for a musical stocking-filler for the under-12s in your life, relax:

you've found it. Here, bright-eyed and tail wagging, is Saint-Saëns's musical menagerie – evoked with warmth and real finesse by Britain's best-known musical family and interspersed with new poems by the *War Horse* man, Michael Morpurgo, who shares the narration with Olivia Colman and Mariatu, the youngest of the Kanneh-Mason siblings.

The friendly lions and airborne kangaroos of Emma Chichester Clark's cover art set the mood. Morpurgo knows his audience too well to patronise them; his animals are wry, self-assertive, remarkably educated (the donkeys compare themselves to Achilles) and his hint of a burr, paired with Colman's measured, kindly tones, dispels any possibility of archness. Musically: well, grown-ups who are primarily interested in the score will need to look elsewhere. The 45 short tracks here form an interwoven narrative, with Morpurgo actually interrupting the music in 'Fossils'.

But if you're on board for the ride, the Kanneh-Masons (plus some distinguished friends) play Saint-Saëns's *jeu d'esprit* with a sensitivity that might verge on the wistful if it wasn't balanced by such evident fantasy and joy. Isata, on piano, is the most striking presence: sweeping into the big climaxes with terrific verve and finding Impressionist undertones amid the clucks and roars. The clarinet of Mark Simpson (no less) adds haunting colours to the 'Cuckoo', and Toby Hughes's bass gives a velvety glow to 'Tortoises'. Sheku plays 'The Swan' with eloquent poise.

And then there's the bonus: Morpurgo's short ecological fable *Grandpa Christmas*, illustrated with lollipops by Bartók, Rimsky-Korsakov and (exquisitely) Castelnuovo-Tedesco. Apparently the Kanneh-Masons used to listen to Dame Edna Everage's *Peter and the Wolf* (Naxos) before school. This is rather less outrageous, but it's surely destined to create just as many happy memories.

**Richard Bratby**

## Shapero

**Credo. On Green Mountain.**

**Partita**<sup>a</sup>. **Serenade. Sinfonia**

<sup>a</sup>Vivian Choi *pf*

**Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose**

BMOP/sound © 1072 (84' • DDD/DSD)



Hearing the opening selection without knowing the composer's identity,

one might venture to guess Stravinsky in regard to the bold and widely spaced woodwind-writing. Then again, you'll notice jagged Coplandish phrases, yet the long stretches of rhythmic steadiness suggest a less pantonal version of Hindemith. While contrapuntal traffic is quite busy, it never sounds clogged or congested, as first-desk soloists break loose in free-flowing solo flights. The game plan is decidedly neoclassical but the composer avoids clichés of stylisation and anything remotely formulaic. Whoever is responsible for such seemingly familiar yet refreshing and inventive music possesses a cool head and controlled temperament, even if restless, unpredictable forces frequently rise to the surface.

In short, you've been hearing the *Sinfonia* in C minor by Harold Shapero, whose mentors indeed included Stravinsky, Copland and Hindemith, although he considered Nadia Boulanger to be his greatest teacher. Shapero's high craft and innate musical gifts did not go unnoticed

or unrewarded. His 1948 *Symphony for Classical Orchestra* caused quite a stir for its fusion of 19th-century symphonic precepts and fiercely contemporary sensibility. After Shapero joined the Brandeis University faculty, his creative output considerably shrank and eventually dried up. André Previn's revival of the *Symphony* in the late 1980s generated new interest in Shapero, and sparked the composer's creativity a bit.

This year marks what would have been Shapero's 100th birthday, and what better way to reassess his legacy than by Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project presenting some of the composer's long-unheard masterpieces, including the aforementioned *Sinfonia*. The *Credo* for orchestra is lyrical and slow-moving, featuring wide, uplifting melodic leaps tempered by discreet yet palpable dabs of dissonance. Written for jazz ensemble, *On Green Mountain* transforms a Monteverdi madrigal into a deftly scored and organically swinging tour de force: it conveys the airy intricacy of what would be known as 'Third Stream' jazz without working too hard to make its points.

The excellent annotator Rodney Lister likens Shapero's 1945 *Serenade* in D for string orchestra to 'diatonic Babbitt' in terms of its textural and rhythmic complexity; I'd lean towards two other 'Bs': Bloch and Bartók. However, for structural rigour, emotional force and unambiguous originality, the multi-movement *Partita* in C minor for piano and small orchestra takes top honours. Soloist Vivian Choi clearly revels in the piano part's sweeping scales and organ-like sonorities building from the bottom up, and her assertive projection underlines the writing's urgency and sinew. Shapero's music stands apart from trends and fashions, never takes the easy way out and communicates with authority. If you care the least about important American orchestral music, don't miss this release. **Jed Distler**

## Vaughan Williams

**Symphony No 5. Scenes adapted from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress**<sup>a</sup>

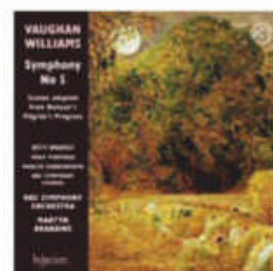
<sup>a</sup>Emily Portman *folk voice* <sup>a</sup>Kitty Whately *mez*

<sup>a</sup>Marcus Farnsworth *bar* <sup>a</sup>BBC Singers Quartet;

**BBC Symphony** <sup>a</sup>Chorus and Orchestra /

**Martyn Brabbins**

Hyperion © CDA68325 (67' • DDD • T)



Martyn Brabbins's Vaughan Williams symphony cycle continues to go





Delectably poised: Martyn Brabbins's Vaughan Williams symphony cycle goes from strength to strength with an outstanding Fifth

from strength to strength with this impressively cogent, self-effacing Fifth, a reading notable for its unhurried demeanour, clarity of texture and orchestral playing of conspicuous finesse and lustre. Enhanced by sound at once glowing and transparent, the first movement grips from the off; indeed, there's an enviable wholeness, lofty integrity and sureness of purpose that effortlessly hold the listener. The BBC SO winds are a personable, witty bunch in the Scherzo, which scampers along with both captivating zest and infectious rhythmic point. The ensuing Romanza blossoms into something exceptional, those truly *mp cantabile* violas and cellos at fig 9's *Pochino più movimento* marking (8'29") ushering in a climax of such tonal refulgence and emotional clout that I was reminded of Previn's classic LSO account (RCA, 3/72). Come the passacaglia finale, and I love the disarming echoes of RVW's *Pastoral Symphony* that Brabbins and his eloquent players locate from fig 11 (4'43"), as well as the marvellously unforced inevitability of the return of the opening material – a tremendous sense of homecoming memorably reinforced by the double basses' bedrock octave

pedal D just 15 bars from the end. All told, a scrupulously attentive, uncommonly humane Fifth, utterly free of artifice and, to my mind, deserving of a place alongside Barbirolli (EMI/Warner, 5/44), Boult (Decca, 4/54), the aforementioned Previn, Handley (EMI/Warner, 3/88), and Haitink's studio and live performances with the LPO from December 1994 (EMI/Warner, 12/95, and LPO, 10/13).

Given the symphony's inextricable thematic links with Vaughan Williams's 1951 opera *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the coupling could hardly be more intriguing, representing as it does the composer's earliest musical engagement with Bunyan's text. For Evelyn Oules's 1906 production in Reigate Priory (which adapted a dozen scenes from the first part of the book) Vaughan Williams fashioned some 27 minutes of incidental music. Shining jewel among the six vocal numbers (indeed, of the entire sequence) is unquestionably 'The Angel's Song' (track 11), delivered with exquisite understanding and melting beauty by mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately; moreover, the string-writing here is already wholly characteristic of its creator. Elsewhere,

the hymn tune 'York' frames proceedings (as it does the opera), 'The Arming of Christian' (track 9) incorporates 'Who would true valour see' set to one of RVW's own tunes, 'Monk's Gate' (it also appears in the then newly published *The English Hymnal*), and in the 'Final Scene' (track 16, from 2'14") there's even a tantalising foretaste of the immortal *Tallis Fantasia* (whose Gloucester world premiere was still four years distant). In addition, there are excellent contributions from folk singer Emily Portman and baritone Marcus Farnsworth, while Brabbins secures a delectably poised and bright-eyed response from his assembled BBC forces.

A rather special release, this, and emphatically not to be missed.

Andrew Achenbach



# Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 3

**Martin Helmchen** talks to John Evans about freedom vs control in this expressive masterpiece

Right now, interviewing a musician requires a little more sensitivity than usual, not least because a significant part of their livelihood is likely to have fallen victim to coronavirus. And so it is with Martin Helmchen, who, just two hours before our Zoom encounter, has learnt that his concert in Bavaria, the last date still standing among the ruins of an upcoming tour with his trio, has now also been cancelled.

'My wife [the trio's cellist, Marie-Elisabeth Hecker] and I were so looking forward to performing with violinist Antje Weithaas, but sadly, it's not to be,' he tells me.

It's time, then, to raise his spirits by reminding him of this magazine's bestowal upon him of its special Beethoven 250 Award in this year's *Gramophone* Awards in recognition of his recent recording of Beethoven's Piano Concertos Nos 2 and 5 with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin conducted by Andrew Manze, one that also *nearly* won the Concerto category and which helped secure Alpha Classics, the company behind the recording, Label of the Year.

'I am delighted. It means so much to have been recognised in this way, especially with a recording of music that is so well known.' And, he might have added, never more so than now in this, Beethoven's anniversary year. It's a point that *Gramophone's* judges aired in their deliberations, but they were immediately won over by the sense of collaborative music-making that permeates Helmchen's performances. He's pleased that the secret of his win is out, as he tells me during our interview that focuses on Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 3, along with the composer's Triple Concerto – the next release in his Beethoven concertos cycle with Manze and the Berlin orchestra.

'A spirit of cooperation and understanding is vital to my work as a chamber musician, and I believe that this same spirit is increasingly becoming the key to modern performances of larger works such as piano concertos. We are coming to realise that the music lies not only in the solo part but with the orchestra too.'

As an example, Helmchen points to the way that at the start of the *presto* finale towards the end of the third movement the orchestra faithfully echoes the piano's playful, cantering triplets. 'At this point, some orchestras concentrate on precision at the expense of expression. The Berlin strings and wind section manage to be precise but also cheeky and graceful.'



Helmchen and conductor Andrew Manze complete their cycle of Beethoven piano concertos with No 3 in C minor

It's a wonderful moment. Of course, it helps that my brother-in-law is principal oboe!

This level of musical intimacy must have required hours of discussion, I suggest, but Helmchen claims that he and the orchestra have so much in common that often only a sense of trust combined with non-verbal communication was necessary. Given the Third's improvisatory quality, that's some claim, but Helmchen says Beethoven actually enables it: 'The way he writes for the orchestra allows the pianist more freedom; certainly more than they are granted in the earlier concertos.'

Of course, with freedom comes responsibility. Helmchen concedes that performing the Third is a difficult balance between control and letting go. 'You find the spirit of improvisation everywhere: in the cadenza, of course, but also in the weird subdivisions of the scales where Beethoven squeezes in as many notes as possible to arrive on the right note at the right time. They must sound like an improvisation, but be precise too.'

As is well known, Beethoven had barely sketched out the piano part in time for the concerto's first performance in 1803. He performed much of it from memory, doubtless with some improvisation thrown in when recall failed him. Did this



include pedalling, I wonder, as at the opening of the second movement? 'The pedal mark he gives here is outrageous,' says Helmchen. 'At one point, there are three harmonies overlaying each other. He creates a sense of the music being heard in the distance, but it's very difficult to control, especially on a modern piano, so you constantly have to adjust your pedalling.'

Helmchen's success in balancing freedom of expression with control are, he says, second nature to him. He never plays anything in his practice that he can't control, an approach that pays dividends in his execution of the Third's endless runs and, in particular, its ornaments. 'The Third is one of the most ornamented works Beethoven wrote. The challenge is to play them in such a way that the melodic line is not lost.'


Trills, especially those where Beethoven requires the pianist to play a melody in the same hand (for example, towards the end of the first-movement cadenza), are, he says, particularly taxing. 'They took a lot of practice. Where they are played without melody, I perfected a technique whereby I don't let the piano keys fully return to their starting positions, allowing me to play the trills faster and more precisely.'

*'I'd underestimated No 3. There's a sense of mystery about the second movement, and in the third, the tempo is not easy to find'*

Staying with articulation, I'm struck by Helmchen's respect for Beethoven's staccato and portamento markings. Rather than being blindly obedient, the pianist says that how a key is struck is, in his view, even more important than playing the correct note. 'Touch and articulation carry so much emotional meaning. What was Beethoven trying to say? The answer lies in his markings, if you look hard enough.'

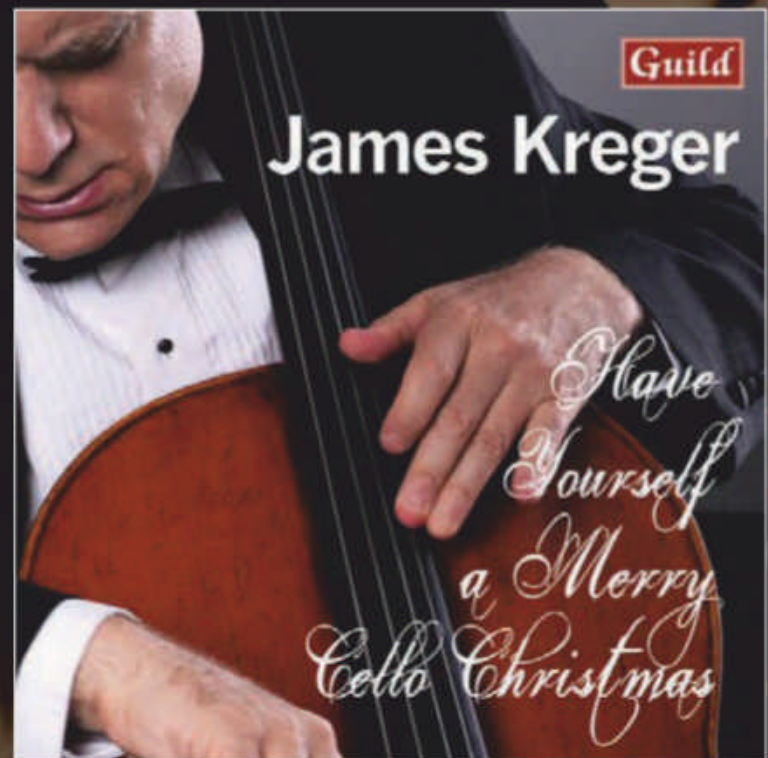
Remarkably, given its position in the cycle, the Third was the last Beethoven piano concerto that Helmchen learnt. He had thought it presented few expressive challenges, and that since he was already steeped in Beethoven's music, it would come naturally to him. He was wrong. 'I had underestimated it. For example, there's a real sense of mystery about the second movement, and in the third, the tempo is not easy to find.'

The last movement presents another challenge in the shape of the series of rising scales in the piano culminating each time with the entry of the orchestra. They're moments of pure edge-of-the-seat excitement, but while they require fierce control to pull them off, ensuring the orchestra's timely entry demands a level of understanding between player and orchestra verging on the supernatural. 'So that I could watch the conductor, I played the notes on autopilot; but ultimately, I put my faith in the orchestra to know precisely when I would arrive and be ready for it.'

They're just one of many moments in a concerto that never lets up either technically or musically. It sounds exhausting. Helmchen agrees and says it's no more so than at the finish where the pianist plays a punishing round of broken chords at full tilt, followed by awkward unison passages two octaves apart. 'Combined with the rush of adrenaline as the end approaches, it's the section I struggled with most,' he admits. Is he tempted to accompany the orchestra in the closing chords? 'Others have but it's not what Beethoven intended.' Faithful to the end. 

► To read our review of Helmchen's recording of Concerto No 3 turn to page 50

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# Chamber



## Harriet Smith hears Schumann from the Emerson Quartet:

*'The Emerson's playing is on a predictably high level, and their sheer panache in the faster movements is impressive'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



## Mark Seow falls for a seductive Baroque album for violin and lute:

*'Dunford's pluck grows to a thwanging groan, as if the strings of his theorbo were connected to our very own chordae tendineae'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**

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Linn © CKD626 (52' • DDD)



This sequel delivers entirely wonderful playing from Ensemble Marsyas.

Much of what Lindsay Kemp found excellent about the first instalment of this selection of music by Francesco Barsanti (A/17) is replicated and multiplied: certainly, the 'chortling energy' returns in ecstatic delight. Though the horns are left out of the mix in the final five concerti grossi, David Blackadder's dynamite trumpet-playing and the sprightly oboes of Alex Bellamy and Hannah McLaughlin (who sometimes seek to outdo Blackadder in trumpet-ness) more than make up for this. Indeed, director Peter Whelan has hit the fixing jackpot and assembled a team of Britain's finest period players for our delight. The *tutti* violin-playing is particularly exquisite – neat but never plain – and Elizabeth Kenny's glistening theorbo is perpetually lovely. Admittedly, the Barsanti concerti grossi fluctuate in compositional quality. Yet Ensemble Marsyas make miracles, speaking through the musically mundane with eloquence and verve.

A most charming moment on the disc is when the pageantry ends for the night and we're treated to something entirely different by way of four intimate *Scots Tunes*. It's as if the listener has happened across an alley in the old city, one that surely wasn't there in the daytime, and enters a tavern made warm by candlelight and the sounds of fiddling. Violinist Colin Scobie evokes this scene and more with such enviable naturalness that one wouldn't be surprised if this folkiness was his

musicking mother tongue. Scobie's sound is sweet, and ornaments spiral out with oxygenated ease. **Mark Seow**

## Brahms

Horn Trio, Op 40<sup>a</sup>. Cello Sonata No 1, Op 38 (arr Grimwood). Scherzo (F-A-E Sonata), WoO2 (transcr Simon Smith)

**Alec Frank-Gemmill** *hn* <sup>a</sup>**Benjamin Marquise**

**Gilmore** *vn* **Daniel Grimwood** *pf*

BIS © BIS2478 (60' • DDD/DSD)



Anyone who loves Brahms even a little bit will know what wonderful roles he gave to the horn, not least the opening of Piano Concerto No 2. But this programme from Alec Frank-Gemmill is an altogether different and intriguing proposition – pairing Brahms's Horn Trio alongside horn transcriptions of two further chamber works Brahms originally penned for violin and cello, respectively his 'FAE' Sonata Scherzo and the Cello Sonata No 1 in E minor. What's more, there's a period-performance flavour to the whole, with Frank-Gemmill performing the Trio on the same instrument upon which Aubrey Brain recorded it in 1933 – originally built as a natural horn although later fitted with a detachable valveblock, meaning it has the softer, plumper, natural tone Brahms specifically stipulated for this work – and with Benjamin Marquise Gilmore's 1921 violin strung with a mixture of wound and plain gut.

In the Trio, the balance of instruments is very satisfying, as is the overall sound: attractively nimble, light and bright, although for me it doesn't quite give Teunis van der Zwart, Isabelle Faust and Alexander Melnikov (Harmonia Mundi, A/08) a run for their money, especially in the Scherzo and the finale, where the latter ensemble's virtuosity comes with a sparkle and exuberant sniff of danger that's hard to top.

On to the transcriptions, though, and I'm thoroughly persuaded by Grimwood's

G minor reworking of the cello sonata. For starters, the sombre first theme translates into the horn's autumnal tones like a dream. Then I'm also wondering how I never heard horn calls in the writing before, and Frank-Gemmill's intelligent shaping and articulation all contribute to its success.

I'm less convinced by Simon Smith's programme-opening 'FAE' transcription, despite Frank-Gemmill describing it as presenting fewest problems for the arranger, thanks to a tessitura that worked without transposition, and a violin part that clearly conjures up horn calls – fitting perfectly with its pounding 6/8 hunting rhythm. To my ears, those opening staccato Gs are too low and thus lose power, while the following octave leaps don't translate naturally, although I can't fail to admire the technique with which they're dispatched here. Perhaps listen and draw your own conclusions; certainly the E minor Sonata is very much worth a listen. **Charlotte Gardner**

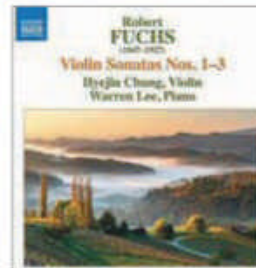
## R Fuchs

Violin Sonatas - No 1, Op 20;

No 2, Op 33; No 3, Op 68

**Hyejin Chung** *vn* **Warren Lee** *pf*

Naxos © 8 574213 (86' • DDD)



He may long ago have become a footnote in musical history but Robert Fuchs (1847-

1927) was more than the able pedagogue whom Brahms admired through being no mere epigone. Having recorded the Serenades, already in Fuch's lifetime considered his most significant works, Naxos turns to the first three of the six violin sonatas that range over the greater part of his creativity.

Much of Fuch's inherent reticence – whether as a man or musician – is evident from the First Sonata (1877), its leisurely initial *Allegro* focusing on wistful rumination that intensifies only





Eloquence and verve: Peter Whelan leads the Ensemble Marayas in exuberant performances of music with Edinburgh connections by Francesco Barsanti

provisionally in the development, then a central *Andante* whose chaste ‘song without words’ eloquence affords greater contrast with the forthright and purposeful finale. Underlining that Fuchs evolved but incrementally, the Second Sonata (1883) unfolds from an opening *Allegro* of no mean impetus, via a slow movement whose melodic writing verges on the hymnic, to a finale whose *giocosso* marking does not exclude a Brahmsian fervency. This is even truer of the Third Sonata (1902), its first movement fusing thematic dexterity with an emotional range carried over to an *Andante* whose gracious variations admit of deeper sentiments, then a final *Allegro* paying homage to the Hungarian style beloved by Viennese composers of Fuch’s era.

Music such as this needs to be performed with due regard to its textural clarity and expressive poise, which it receives in abundance from Hyejin Chung and Warren Lee – the attentiveness of their music-making well served by the admirably lucid sound. Qualities, indeed, that will doubtless be equally in evidence on the follow-up release of Fuch’s subsequent three sonatas. **Richard Whitehouse**

## Hennies

Spectral Malsconcities<sup>a</sup>. Unsettle<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Bearthoven; <sup>b</sup>Bent Duo

New World © 80824-2 (65’ • DDD)



When he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, the composer

Giacinto Scelsi nursed himself back to health by playing a single note over and over on the piano, entering meditatively into its sound. The beginning of Sarah Hennies’s delicate *Unsettle* for piano and percussion recalls this. Bent Duo languidly guide us through successive spare environments of sound, many of them based on single repeated piano notes accompanied by unpitched percussion or electronic oscillation. From a two-page score emerges half an hour of music: minimal means, maximal exploration.

As Hennies notes, listening to a single repeated event for five minutes has the effect of altering your perception. The event somehow transforms while remaining the same. It feels as if Hennies

is going back to minimalism’s roots in austere experimental processes, before it was channelled into a new tonalism. *Unsettle* at times features vibraphone to generate rich overtones by repeated notes and chromatic dyads.

*Spectral Malsconcities* for trio, the other work here, is also half an hour long and slightly less reductive. Hennies has said that the score, much of which is metrically asynchronous (each performer playing in a different metre), was conceived this way so that the performance would fall apart after a while. As it turned out, the virtuoso ensemble were able to play it perfectly; this gave a better result than she had imagined. Bearthoven’s virtuosity is understated and their sound (piano, double bass, percussion) recalls a free-improvisation group. The second of the *Spectral Malsconcities*’ five sections sees polymetrical notes pulsating ad nauseum. The trio’s repeated motifs and pulses create a steady auditory frame of reference Hennies exploits by throwing in irregularities and parasitic elements.

In both works, the grain of the instrumental sound is audible: squeak



of percussion, scratch of materials. This alerts us to the living quality of the music: the performers, their heartbeats; the bodily energy making the sound happen, the thoughts running through the performers' minds. Hennies was recently the subject of a *New York Times* article and this disc captures her at an interesting early career stage.

Liam Cagney

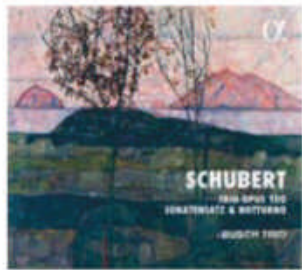
## Schubert

Piano Trio No 2, D929. Notturmo, D897.

Sonata Satz, D28

Busch Trio

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA632 (66' • DDD)



I didn't expect to begin this review with the single-movement

*Sonata Satz* – and it's true, you're not likely to buy this album for the sake of what Tully Potter, in the booklet notes, describes as no more than a 'pleasing encore'. But still: what a perfect little distillation of the qualities of the Busch Trio, as well as the unformed but still unmistakably real genius of the 15-year-old Schubert!

Listen to the enthusiasm with which it leaps out of the opening bars; the way guileless courtesies, tender-hearted lyricism and obvious homages to Beethoven and Mozart jostle for position. And how the Busch Trio take Schubert's sincerity at face value: whether Omri Epstein's piano, swelling with a grandeur that befits a teenage composer with something Very Important to say, or violinist Matthieu Van Bellen's limpid, unforced phrasing when Schubert really does confide something truly personal.

In short, they play with affection and style – a spirit that carries on over into the *Notturmo*, where a knack for storytelling combines with a vivid but always appropriate ear for instrumental colour and emotional atmosphere. It all points to the Busch Trio's continuing commitment – as Rob Cowan put it, reviewing their Dvořák trios a little while back (9/16) – 'to put the music, and only the music, first'.

So in their E flat Trio, you'll find a similar combination of tonal beauty, poetic feeling and ebullient grandeur, all charged with the same alert, purposeful energy. The *Andante*, in particular, has a real sense of purpose; this is a wanderer with a very definite destination in view, and the Busch players are not afraid to

get mud on their boots in Trio of the Scherzo, either. The finale has both exuberance and poise, but you never forget – rightly – that this is a young man's music. **Richard Bratby**

## Schubert

String Quartets – No 4, D46; No 12, 'Quartettsatz', D703; No 14, 'Death and the Maiden', D810

Arod Quartet

Erato Ⓢ 9029 51724-7 (71' • DDD)



In the mythic language of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Arod – the name given to Legolas's horse – means 'swift'.

It could hardly be more apt to this young Paris-based quartet. If you thought the Chiaroscuro's spine-chilling performance of the *Death and the Maiden's* tarantella finale at the edge of the possible, try the Arod. Their ride to the abyss is surely the fastest on disc. Yet this is no mere technical stunt. Imaginatively coloured, uncommonly wide in dynamic range, the Arod's playing combines clarity of detail with a thrilling, desperate abandon. Going for broke, and beyond, they generate a truly cataclysmic climax where Schubert threatens rhythmic disintegration (from bar 393). At their lightning pace you doubt whether they will find an extra gear for the frenzied *Prestissimo* send-off. But they do.

In the opening *Allegro* the Arod marry febrile urgency with extreme flexibility. Their drastic slowing after the peremptory initial summons, and their tempo freedom in the development (where louder tends to mean faster), is provocative. Other quartets, including the Chiaroscuro and the more spacious Pavel Haas, integrate Schubert's contrasts within a steadier overall pulse. But on their own terms the Arod succeed brilliantly, not least in their perfect balancing of Schubert's filigree *pianissimo* textures. They go for maximum contrasts, too, in the *Andante*, tearing remorselessly into the hammering dactyls of the third variation and floating the G major idyll that follows with exquisite tenderness.

After the hurtling finale of the *Death and the Maiden* the Arod's splenetic tempo for the *Quartettsatz* seems pre-scripted. The opening explodes like a supernova. Again, extremes of pace and dynamics, including a barely corporeal *ppp*, go hand in hand with extreme fluidity of pulse. While their performance is

undeniably exciting, the Arod – more than in *Death and the Maiden* – can indulge the moment at the expense of the music's overall sweep. To my ears their lingering hesitations where the music melts from C minor to A flat major (from bar 23) sound consciously applied rather than a natural response to changing harmonic colour.

Such reactions are, of course, notoriously subjective. Crucially, though, the Arod always compel with their questing imagination, both in the two masterpieces and in the C major Quartet, tossed off by the teenage Schubert in five days flat. The Arod are properly full-blooded in the orchestrally inspired first movement, gently point the ambiguity of metre (3/4 versus 6/8) in the Haydnesque *Andante* and conjure a lusty folkfest in the finale: a feel-good send-off to a disc that, like their superb Mendelssohn debut album (11/17), makes me eager to hear them in the flesh – sadly, a less realistic prospect today than those more innocent, pre-Covid times.

**Richard Wigmore**

*'Death and the Maiden' Quartet – selected comparisons:*

Pavel Haas Qt (10/13) (SUPR) SU4110-2

Chiaroscuro Qt (11/18) (BIS) BIS2268

## Schumann

Three String Quartets, Op 41

Emerson Quartet

Pentatone Ⓢ PTC5186 869 (77' • DDD)



The Emerson Quartet mark their debut on Pentatone after a long association with DG

with the three quartets of Schumann. There's a moving introduction by leader Eugene Drucker talking about music and musicians in lockdown (the recordings were made in 2018 and 2019) and drawing parallels between the fragility of the situation and Schumann's extremes of mood.

The Emerson's playing is on a predictably high level, technically speaking, and the quartet's sheer panache in the faster movements is often impressive. They take the finale of the Second Quartet at a truly *Allegro molto vivace* and the almost inhuman demands of the *Più mosso* section hold no fears for them. Their blend of sound is impressive in the Scherzo second movement of the Third, as is their clarity of narrative through the contrasting sections right up to the final *Tempo risoluto*. In the last movement



of the same quartet there's an abundance of energy and absolute precision to the unison dotted rhythm of the main rondo theme. Interestingly, they're even faster in their 1984 recording of No 3 (the only Schumann quartet they've previously recorded, featuring cellist David Finckel), though still recognisable as the same group in their approach.

However, this music is about so much more, and too often they seem to miss the mark. In the opening movement of the First Quartet, for instance, they apply portamentos freely in the *Andante espressivo* introduction; but how much more vividly and subtly the Zehetmair convey its tortured quality, carrying that through to the following *Allegro* as if not quite trusting its apparent good humour, whereas the Emerson are all bustling efficiency. The fragility at the end of the first movement is also in short supply on this new recording. The same quartet's Scherzo is somewhat motoric in effect – not just a matter of speed but of articulation and textural balance too. Again, the Zehetmair make much more of it, with subtler accentuation and a fleet speed, while their Intermezzo has a greater flexibility than in the Emerson's account. The opening of the Second Quartet is

short on geniality too, with the Emerson a world away from the warmth of the Elias, who illuminate it with a most natural conversational quality. For the theme of the variation-form second movement the Emerson are slightly faster-paced than the Elias or the Doric and if it's plain-speaking you're after, you may warm to them more than I did. But for me, this is a disappointment.

#### Harriet Smith

*Selected comparison – coupled as above:*  
*Doric Qt (12/11) (CHAN) CHAN10692*  
*Quartets Nos 1 & 3 – selected comparison:*  
*Zehetmair Qt (6/03) (ECM) 472 1692*  
*Quartets Nos 2 & 3 – selected comparison:*  
*Elias Qt (5/18) (ALPH) ALPHA280*  
*Quartet No 3 – selected comparison:*  
*Emerson Qt (4/91) (DG) 431 650-2GH*

### AR Thomas

The Auditions<sup>a</sup>. Avian Capriccio<sup>b</sup>. Plea for Peace<sup>c</sup>. Ripple Effects<sup>d</sup>. Selene<sup>e</sup>. Two Thoughts About the Piano<sup>f</sup>. Your Kiss<sup>g</sup>

<sup>c</sup>Jessica Aszodi, <sup>g</sup>Claire Booth *sops* <sup>c</sup>Yuan-Qing Yu,

<sup>c</sup>Ni Mei *vns* <sup>c</sup>WeiJing Wang *va* <sup>c</sup>Ken Olsen *vc*

<sup>g</sup>Andrew Matthews-Owen, <sup>f</sup>Daniel Pesca *pf*

<sup>d</sup>Joey Brink, <sup>d</sup>Michael Solotke *carillon*

<sup>b</sup>Axiom Brass Quintet; <sup>a</sup>ICE Ensemble / Vimbayi Kaziboni; <sup>e</sup>Third Coast Percussion / Cliff Colnot

Nimbus Alliance © NI6402 (80' • DDD • T)



Augusta Read Thomas's association with Nimbus has been crucial to

expanding her recorded profile, and this eighth release provides an instructive overview through works written these past five years. Practicable virtuosity is evident in *Avian Capriccio*, whose writing for brass quintet yields the lively interplay of 'Hummingbirds', regal detachment of 'Swans' and jazzy exchanges of 'Canaries'. From here to *Plea for Peace* is to encounter understated eloquence in the melodic intensifying of its vocalise against plangent harmonies from the string quartet. Few non-specialist composers have written for carillon but *Ripple Effects* audibly makes the most of Rockefeller Chapel's cascading panoply of bells and its starkly evocative resonance.

Timbral scintillation, long a facet of Thomas's armoury, comes to the fore in *The Auditions*, a ballet in which the rhythmic vitality of its even-numbered movements is thrown into relief by the shimmering aura of the other four, as if placing human activity at an ethereal

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# GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

## BEETHOVEN PIANO TRIOS

**David Threasher** enjoys two new surveys of well-trodden musical ground



High spirits: Trio Sōra make an impressive debut with Beethoven

### Beethoven

Piano Trios – Nos 1-3, Op 1; No 5, 'Ghost', Op 70 No 1; No 6, Op 70 No 2; No 7, 'Archduke', Op 97  
**Trio Sōra**

Naïve ⓑ ⓐ V7085 (3h 10' • DDD)

### Beethoven

Piano Trios – No 3, Op 1 No 3; No 5, 'Ghost', Op 70 No 1; No 6, Op 70 No 2; No 7, 'Archduke', Op 97

**Smetana Trio**

Supraphon Ⓜ ⓐ SU4288-2 (132' • DDD)



When Beethoven decided in 1795 to announce himself to his adopted Vienna as a published composer, it was not with a symphony or a set of string quartets – in which Mozart and Haydn remained pre-eminent – but with three piano trios. His Op 1 duly demonstrated that he, perhaps uniquely among his contemporaries, was able to imbibe the example of those two great composers and create music that recognisably followed the traditions they had mastered but with a voice that was wholly his own.

Two and a quarter centuries on, Trio Sōra announce themselves with a debut recording of Beethoven's six original

numbered piano trios. Their name comes from a Native American word meaning 'a bird that sings as it takes flight' and they trained with an impressive list of mentors, having initially come together at the Paris Conservatoire. They have been commended for 'the boldness and clarity of their interpretations', and these are attributes that mark out their debut recording. Tempos are comparably swift in faster movements but accuracy of attack and articulation vividly convey the high spirits of this music.

They shoot up the 'Mannheim rocket' that launches Op 1 No 1, instantly setting out their manifesto: a palpable joy in the interplay the music requires, virtuosity ever at the service of shaping and structure, with a wide range of dynamics including some whispered *pianissimos*. Slow movements are unsentimental but without being hurried. They distil a potent intensity in the troubled *Sturm und Drang* of the C minor Trio, Op 1 No 3, although they are not neglectful of the motivic concentration of an outwardly lighter movement such as the finale of the G major Trio, Op 1 No 2. The focused sound as recorded in the wood-lined Salle de Musique at La-Chaux-de-Fonds conspires with the trio's acutely considered music-making in a recording that truly grabs the attention.

The Smetana Trio have a pedigree going back to 1934, their current

incarnation comprising three big names in Czech music, including, on cello, Jan Páleníček, son of the trio's founding pianist. They open their account of the C minor Trio a notch slower than the Sōra, in a Prague studio acoustic that offers a degree more air around the sound. This rather suits the grander conception of the three late trios, especially the expansive *Archduke*. The central movement of the D major Trio, Op 70 No 1, which gives the work its *Ghost* sobriquet, provides a useful comparison, the Smetana efficiently communicating the mystery behind its tremolandos and *sforzandos*, while the Sōra, a whole minute and a half slower, fully subscribe to the Grand Guignol drama of the movement, delivering each new shock with ghoulish glee.

In the neglected E flat Trio, Op 70 No 2, the Sōra are comparable in clarity and blend with the Beethoven Trio Bonn (AVI-Music, 9/20). Perhaps, though, it is the *Archduke* where contrasts of approach are starkest. The Sōra are, once again, sprightlier than the Smetana in the Scherzo, although the insertion of a breath between each four-bar phrase at the opening gives it a distinct gait rather than a flow. Perhaps surprising is the Sōra's quizzical approach to the opening phrases of the finale, only gradually building up to tempo. Here the Smetana are more persuasive; but so are the Van Baerle Trio in their recent *intégrale*, the tempo up a notch or two, the awkward turns more comfortably under the fingers of Hannes Minnaar than those of either Pauline Chennais for the Sōra or Jitka Čechová for the Smetana.

The Van Baerle also offer a well-stocked survey, with the six trios of the Sōra's set, plus Trio No 4 (the *Gassenhauer*), originally for clarinet, cello and piano, as well as the unpublished trios, variation sets, arrangements and the Triple Concerto. The debut of Trio Sōra is an impressive achievement for this young ensemble and is worthy of three hours of any Beethovenian's time. The Van Baerle Trio's cycle, though, with a headier mix of acuity and intimacy, is now available in a five-CD box at a keenly competitive price. Listening in parallel to the two newcomers alongside the Van Baerle and the Beethoven Trio Bonn has offered four different, complementary and equally compelling aspects on these cherishable masterworks. **G**

*Piano Trios – selected comparison:*

*Van Baerle Trio* (4/18<sup>R</sup>, 7/19<sup>R</sup>, 3/20<sup>R</sup>, 9/20<sup>R</sup>)

(CHAL) CC72847 (aas)



remove. The great Elliott Carter is referenced not merely in the title but also laconic wit and glinting dexterity of *Two Thoughts About the Piano*, with the heavenly flight of the moon goddess in *Selene* accorded more visceral presence in Cliff Colnot's effective substitution of woodwind nonet for the string quartet. Setting one of EE Cummings's most rapturous poems, *Your Kiss* draws a suitably fervent response from soprano and piano as it heads toward an ecstatic close.

As usual in this series, performances leave nothing to chance. Fortunate is the composer who has such committed exponents; but then, fortunate the artists who have music so idiomatically conceived and impressively realised. With consistently fine sound and detailed notes by Paul Pellay, this might just prove the release to win sceptics over to Augusta Read Thomas's cause. **Richard Whitehouse**

## 'The Mad Lover'

**H Eccles** A New Division Upon the Ground Bass of 'John come and kiss me'. Premier livre de sonates - No 5; No 11 **J Eccles** The Mad Lover - Two Grounds **Matteis I** Diverse bizzarie sopra la vecchia sarabanda o pur ciaccona. Sarabanda amorosa. Suite in G. Variations on La folia (Divisions on a Ground) **Matteis II** Fantasias - in A minor; in C minor 'con discrezione' **D Purcell** Sonata No 6 **H Purcell** Prelude, Z773 **Théotime Langlois de Swarte** *vn* **Thomas Dunford** *lute/theorbo* Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2305 (80' • DDD)



Théotime Langlois de Swarte. Have you ever read such a fabulous name?

And with fabulous playing to match, it's a name to remember. In a lovely personal reflection on the processes that led to making his debut solo recording, Langlois de Swarte tells us the album's inspiration: the 'utterly sensuous' Ground by John Eccles, incidental music from a 1695 adaptation of John Fletcher's *The Mad Lover* by Peter Motteux. What we're not told is that Langlois de Swarte is the mad lover for this album. Well, not so much mad, but rather the myriad things we associate with being in love.

Langlois de Swarte evokes aching besottedness with unperformative candour. The delightful strumming of Thomas Dunford, a partner in equally passionate crime, is fluent in teenage giddiness too:

his accompaniment bends and swirls like heart-shaped doodles on school textbooks, ephemeral sonic mist rising from a fluttering heart. The duo swerve between daydreaming optimism (has the tonic major ever sounded so wonderful?) to bruised turmoil. The opening track, the Ground from which the album draws its theme, is a masterclass in love-swept changeability. The listener is pulled in different directions: Dunford's pluck grows to a thwanging groan, as if the strings of his theorbo were connected to our very own chordae tendineae, while Langlois de Swarte moans in melancholy, quietly dissolving into wistfulness. I might very well be in love.

Admittedly, the bewildered intoxication might be too much for some. But when Langlois de Swarte emplaces the melancholic *Affekt* within seething virtuosity, it is unignorably eloquent. The Corrente from Henry Eccles's *Sonata undecima* in G minor, possibly Langlois de Swarte's playing at its most excellent, smoulders in seductive fury. The performances from both are imaginative, quick in colour, corporeal, sexy. **Mark Seow**

## 'To Roman Totenberg'

**JS Bach** Violin Sonata No 3, BWV1016 **Bartók** Rhapsody No 1, Sz86 **Franck** Violin Sonata **Szymanowski** Mythes, Op 30 - La fontaine d'Arethuse **Wieniawski** Polonaise de concert, Op 4 **Nathan Meltzer** *vn* **Rohan De Silva** *pf* Champs Hill © CHRCD161 (70' • DDD)



There's every likelihood, were it not for his being highlighted

as *Gramophone's* One to Watch in the November issue, that the American violinist Nathan Meltzer would be a new name to many readers, given that he's still only 20 years of age. However, based on what I'm hearing on this debut album – part of the package for becoming the youngest-ever winner of the Windsor International String Competition back in 2017 – I'd wager that we'll all be hearing a lot more from him over the years to come.

Equally unfamiliar to many will be the album's dedicatee, the Polish-American violinist Roman Totenberg (1911-2012), given that although this former pupil of Carl Flesch, Georges Enescu and Pierre Monteux did enjoy a distinguished performance career, his greatest gift to the musical world was chiefly as a

teacher. But for Meltzer he is a central figure, because Meltzer now plays the 1734 Stradivarius violin that was Totenberg's before it was stolen from him after a concert in 1980, and not recovered until 35 years later, after his death. Hence this album of homage, bringing together a collection of Totenberg's favourite pieces; and an emotionally resonant extra titbit is that just a few days before recording this in the Champs Hill music room, Meltzer had performed a recital in the very hall from which the instrument was stolen, at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Still, as I've already hinted, the reason you should care about this album isn't because it's got a great back story but because this is wonderful playing, supremely polished in technical terms and exuding maturity. Space precludes a detailed description of everything on the programme but I was sold from the first notes of the programme-opening Bach Sonata No 3 – a 'modern' reading with its soft vibrato, but period-aware in terms of the clean poise of Meltzer's delivery and the constant curve of his lines and inflections. Then a gorgeously coloured and shaped Franck Sonata that strikes immediately for the silky legato brought to the thirds of its opening theme; and equally for the satiny softness of the ensuing *Allegro*, rendering it less stormy than often heard, in favour of a gently mournful and even ethereal character; and then again for the luminous-toned exaltation at the final movement's close. Also on show throughout the Franck has been Rohan De Silva's exquisite delicacy and voicing, and the balance between the two players that pitches this absolutely as an evenly weighted duet. The warm, intimate engineering also deserves mention, realising the violin's rounded, husky lower registers and the sweet, bright clarity of its uppers, while ensuring we're equally aware of the glowing tone De Silva produces on the piano.

In short, this is a stunning album – to the extent that this may now be my go-to recording of the Franck.

**Charlotte Gardner**





# Isaac Stern

He was not only a versatile musician but also a mover and shaker in the arts world. Tully Potter celebrates the Ukraine-born US violinist as the centenary year of his birth draws to a close

For decades Isaac Stern (1920-2001) was the leading US-nurtured violinist, a massive presence as soloist, chamber musician and encourager of talents. Yet he was also a public figure, a vital mover in setting up the National Endowment for the Arts and saving Carnegie Hall, to name just two of his causes.

Adhering to no school, he was a one-off. Raised by his Ukrainian parents to be an all-American boy, he was taught by a Viennese, a Dutchman, a European-trained American and a Russian. This eclectic background helped him to master a wide range of styles – his main teacher, Naoum Blinder, had studied in Odessa and, like David Oistrakh, was virtually free of the Leopold Auer influence.

Stern also escaped the prodigy trap. Brought up on the West Coast, he enjoyed early success there but always had his sights set on New York, where at first he was not appreciated. After his breakthrough in his early twenties he became one of the city's chief musical ornaments, appearing 64 times with the New York Philharmonic and some 200 times at Carnegie Hall.

He acknowledged several conductors as mentors, the most unlikely being Sir Thomas Beecham, with whom he recorded Brahms and Sibelius. Initially, the two were oddly assorted, but after several days' work together, Beecham looked up from his score and said: 'My my, you do play the violin awfully well, don't you.' Others were Dimitri Mitropoulos (a souvenir of their friendship is Prokofiev's First Concerto) and Eugene Ormandy, with whom Stern and Leonard Rose recorded a terrific stereo Brahms Double Concerto (the mono

version with Bruno Walter is also impressive). Undoubtedly, the key relationship was with Leonard Bernstein, two years Stern's senior. They hit it off when they first worked together in 1947, and for both men Israel became a home from home.

In Venice in 1954 they premiered Bernstein's quirky Serenade, and the recording they made two years later in New York, with the Symphony of the Air, has never been surpassed.

When Bernstein took over the New York Philharmonic they became a formidable concerto combination.

Such loyalty was basic to Stern's make-up. He stayed with the same record company (Columbia) for half a century.

For almost 40 years he had the same accompanist, Alexander Zakin, encouraging him to 'play out' (unlike Jascha Heifetz, who preferred his pianists subservient and almost inaudible). He took many young violinists under his wing, notably the Israeli trio of Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukerman and Shlomo Mintz. Strangely, as with many great men, there was another side to him: those he imagined had crossed him, or not submitted to his plans for them, could be implacably frozen out. Aaron Rosand in particular felt that Stern had blighted his career.

From the age of 13 Stern was a keen chamber music player, and when I think of him, small ensemble performances bring a special glow. He made his mark in this *fach* through celebrated 1952 records with Pablo Casals, especially Schubert's String Quintet in C and Brahms's B flat Sextet. At the Casals Festivals he got to know the great American pianist Eugene Istomin and the addition of Rose

*He took many young violinists under his wing, notably the Israeli trio of Perlman, Zukerman and Mintz*

## DEFINING MOMENTS

### • 1921 – *Begins life in US at 10 months old*

Taken by Ukrainian parents (artist and singer) to settle in San Francisco. Starts piano at six; violin at eight. Enters the city's music conservatory: studies with Robert Pollak and Nathan Abas; then Louis Persinger (New York), and Naoum Blinder from 1932.

### • 1935 – *San Francisco Symphony Orchestra debut*

Bach Double with Blinder and piano (orchestra in abeyance that season); 1936, Brahms Violin Concerto under Pierre Monteux.

### • 1939 – *Moves to New York*

Soon playing chamber music with leading musicians.

### • 1941 – *Hires accompanist Alexander Zakın*

Partnership lasts 37 years.

### • 1943 – *Carnegie Hall recital debut*

Huge success. During war gives many concerts for troops.

### • 1948 – *International debuts commence*

European debut, Lucerne Festival. October 10: London debut, Royal Albert Hall, Brahms Concerto with LSO, Basil Cameron. 1949: first tour of Israel. 1950: takes part in first Casals Festival, Prades.

### • 1955 – *Stern–Rose–Istomin trio's first outing*

At Ravinia Festival, Chicago. Then they play just for pleasure until trio officially formed with 1961 tour of Israel.

### • 1956 – *Epoch-making tour of Soviet Union*

First post-war US musician to do so. Helps to ease Cold War.

### • 1960 – *Begins championship of the arts*

Starts successful fight to save Carnegie Hall from demolition. 1965: appointed to National Council on the Arts by US president; assists in establishing National Endowment for the Arts. 1973: founds Jerusalem Music Centre.

### • 1979 – *Tours China with pianist David Golub*

Leads to Oscar-winning documentary *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China* directed by Murray Lerner.





produced the famous trio, immortalised on discs of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn and Schubert. After Rose's death, Stern had a piano quartet with the younger Emanuel Ax, Jaime Laredo (on viola) and Yo-Yo Ma: among their productions were stylish Mozart, sterling Brahms and exquisite Fauré. The string trio easily expanded to take in beautiful performances of Schubert, Boccherini and Brahms – whose String Quintet in G (with Cho-Liang Lin and Michael Tree on violin and viola respectively), left without a disc mate, was issued after Stern's death.

Stern's first recording, in 1945, was Beethoven's C minor Sonata, Op 30 No 2, with Zakin. In 1969, he and Istomin started a cycle with the same work plus Op 12 No 1 in D, but a dispute between pianist and record company delayed resumption until 1982-83. It is a monument to the two men's collective musicianship. In the late 1950s, Stern had an occasional duo with Myra Hess, and we are lucky to have the BBC tape of their 1960 Edinburgh Festival recital, released by Testament: Brahms Sonata No 2 in A, Schubert's Sonata in D, D384, Ferguson's Second Sonata and Beethoven's Op 96.

Late in life, Stern recorded Mozart, Brahms and Bartók with Yefim Bronfman. He premiered works by Dutilleux, Penderecki, Rochberg and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. Sony Classical's 75-disc box-set is devoted just to his pre-digital records. It would be a life's work even without rescuing Carnegie Hall. **G**

#### THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



**Bartók** Violin Concertos Nos 1 & 2  
Isaac Stern *vn* Philadelphia Orchestra /  
Eugene Ormandy; New York  
Philharmonic / Leonard Bernstein  
Sony Classical (No 1: mono 4/59, stereo  
10/59; No 2: 5/62)

Stern championed Bartók from the start  
and his performance of the Second

Concerto has both breadth and cogency, displaying his good understanding with Bernstein. He gave the US premiere of the rediscovered early concerto and was the first to record it: the Hungarian Ormandy is also in his element here.



# Instrumental



**Patrick Rucker is impressed by a Schumann recital from Nino Gvetadze:**

*'Filled with robust contrasts and with exquisitely sculpted phrasing, Gvetadze's sensitivity to inner voices is unsurpassed'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



**Jeremy Nicholas listens to Thalberg from pianist Paul Wee:**

*'The playing here is so magically good that I would buy this set just for these final five items'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**

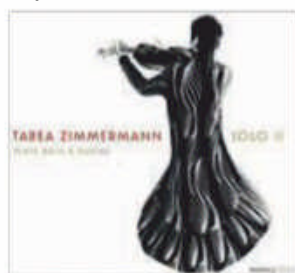
## JS Bach • Kurtág

'Solo II'

**JS Bach** Solo Cello Suites – No 3, BWV1009; No 4, BWV1010 **Kurtág** Signs, Games and Messages – excs

**Tabea Zimmermann** *va*

Myrios © MYRO26 (52' • DDD)



It was in 2009 that Tabea Zimmermann released the first two of Bach's Solo Cello

Suites alongside Reger's three on a disc that Duncan Druce described as 'magnificent' (A/09). Now she's back with the Third and Fourth Suites and an even more imaginative coupling: six of the brief but intense *Signs, Games and Messages* György Kurtág has written for musical friends. Often little more than a minute long, they are powerfully direct in expression while displaying the greatest compositional skill and subtlety. Mourning is a dominant theme: 'Panaszos nóta' imitates the sound of crying; 'Doloroso' is a more eloquent lament; while '... eine Blume für Tabea ...', an elegy for Zimmermann's deceased husband, sounds like an urgent but heartbreakingly distanced dialogue between the living and the dead. Two folk-flavoured pieces (one earthy, one soulful) and an audibly painful argument ('Kromatikuss feleselős') complete this exquisite selection, which Zimmermann plays with compassion and focus – one can only guess at her emotions while playing '... eine Blume ...'.

As for her Bach, it is a joy. I sometimes wonder if these suites work better on the viola than they do on the cello, so much do they gain in lightness and agility. Certainly in Zimmermann's hands they are airborne, free to race and play, dance with nimble feet or graceful swings, and sing with clean, sweetly floated line. Zimmermann's alert range of articulations and rhythmic lifts – constantly busy but never overdone – means that the music never loses its way or its sense of forward motion, and her mind

is full of intelligent and happy ideas. Listen in the Third Suite to the thoughtful working-out of the final bars of the Prélude, the glorious swirling lines at the start of the Courante or the gently pointed calm of the Sarabande; or, in the Fourth, the smoothness of the Prelude's big strides, the kindly caution of the Sarabande and the almost comical contrast between the two Bourrées, one tripping lightly, the other dragging booted feet. Add to this a gorgeous sound from her viola, captured in a superbly judged recording, and you've got a real beauty. **Lindsay Kemp**

## Balakirev

'Complete Piano Works,

Vol 6 – Islamey and Beyond'

**Balakirev** *Au jardin*. *Elegy on the Death of a Mosquito* (compl Walker). *La fileuse*. *Islamey*. *Tamara* (arr Walker). *Toccata*. *Tyrolienne*. *Witches' Dance* (compl Walker) **Glinka** *Do not say: Love passes away*. *Kamarinskaya*. *The Lark* (all arr Balakirev) **Zapolsky** *Rêverie* (arr Balakirev)

**Nicholas Walker** *pf*

Grand Piano © GP846 (80' • DDD)



So the journey ends. A project that began back in 1994 has finally reached

its conclusion with this sixth volume. Indeed, the opening number, the virtuoso 'La fileuse', was also the first item on Vol 1 of the projected complete works for ASV, a series that was curtailed by the label's demise.

Nicholas Walker's dedication to the cause and determination to see it through demands both our admiration and respect. It is a tremendous achievement – and the final tranche is no less full of pianistic goodies than its predecessors. Three premiere recordings are included: the comical *Elegy on the Death of a Mosquito* (1855) and *La danse de sorcières* (1856), both completed by Walker, and his own mammoth (21'10") transcription of

*Tamara*, Balakirev's great orchestral tone poem, a tour de force prompted by Walker's discovery that the composer often used to play it to his friends. 'I have set out to recreate it', writes Walker, 'in pianistic textures redolent of Balakirev's own piano style.'

Elsewhere we have the 'idyll-étude' *Au jardin*, dedicated to Adolf von Henselt, which Walker feels is 'one of the most beautiful pieces ever written for piano, revealing Balakirev at his best'. It's hard to disagree. There's the Polka in F sharp major (Balakirev's first published work from 1859), transcriptions of Glinka songs, the exhilarating Toccata in C sharp minor and, mischievously placed last, what is the composer's best-known work by far. *Islamey* is as much a musical as a technical challenge, a masterpiece that is rather more than a mere virtuoso finger-fest. The way in which Walker maintains its structure while observing all Balakirev's myriad agogic and dynamic markings, with *rits*, *ralls* and *a tempos* in almost every bar, is the result of many years' familiarity. Tiny details like playing the low D flats at the start of the 6/8 *Andantino espressivo* section as strict quavers is a case in point (most pianists ignore the succeeding two quaver rests). Walker storms home in the grandest manner, providing a fitting and exhilarating end to his odyssey. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Chopin

'Vol 6'

**Fantaisie**, Op 49. **Mazurkas** – Op 6; Op 24; Op 41; Op 67. **Two Polonaises**, Op 40. **Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano'**, Op 2

**Louis Lortie** *pf*

Chandos © CHAN20117 (84' • DDD)



A decade after the start of his Chopin series, for its sixth volume Louis Lortie offers another carefully arranged bouquet, this time dominated by the gentle fragrance of mazurkas. Four groups of these, mostly





Imaginative ideas: Tabea Zimmermann combines Bach and Kurtág on an exquisitely recorded album from the Jesus-Christus-Kirche in Berlin

characteristically intimate (though by no means timidly performed) are interspersed with some of Chopin's most extrovert works. Among the latter, pride of place is given to the young composer's homage to Mozart in his Op 2 Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano' from *Don Giovanni*, one of his most dauntingly show-off pieces. Taking the virtuosity in his stride, Lortie infuses each variation with abundant youthful energy and excitement, finding charm amid the dazzle, glitter and extravagance.

Next come the Op 67 posthumously published Mazurkas, before more fireworks with the 'Military' Polonaise, where Lortie seems surprisingly, even off-puttingly cautious. This cannot be for lack of technique, so maybe it's an attempt to place the music higher than audacious display. If so, the aim misfires, sounding merely self-conscious. Ashkenazy's straightforwardness (Decca, 2/97) fits the bill here. Similarly, in the F minor *Fantaisie*, I wish Lortie would let the excitement take wing in the climaxes and especially in the passages of contrary-motion parallel octaves along the way. His restraint here sounds oddly Brahmsian. Yevgeny Sudbin is closer to the mark (BIS, 1/12).

When it comes to the mazurkas, Rubinstein's ultimate version (Naxos)

remains unbeatable for its direct access to the heart of these works. Ashkenazy's set is an alternative and almost diametrically opposite reference-point. If Rubinstein's mazurkas are brief images of a bygone past, glanced at while a matchstick flare flickers out, Ashkenazy (Decca, 11/84) lights each one with a floodlight – yet how exciting and sensitive he sounds even so. Lortie's mazurkas fall somewhere between the two: strongly individual and with a penchant for exploring the mini-drama that each one encapsulates. Take Op 67 No 4, for example; compared to Ashkenazy, Lortie almost disregards its dance quality, instead acting as a confidant who as it were consoles the storyteller: weeping, smiling at the nostalgic memories and ultimately joining in a mood of resignation.

When required, Lortie is not too shy to bring out the snappy rhythms and their capricious volatility. However, in the case of the Op 6 Mazurkas, the earliest set, I do feel his over-thinking and over-planning of each phrase gets in the way of spontaneity, labouring his point rather than merely making it. Still, on balance this disc is distinguished by the humanistic, selfless music-making, devoid of sentimentality, for which Lortie's Chopin has justly been praised. **Michelle Assay**

## A-L Couperin

Pièces de clavecin

**Christophe Rousset** *hpd*

Aparté © (two discs for the price of one) **AP236**  
(100' • DDD)



Armand-Louis Couperin was not the nephew of François Couperin,

as is sometimes asserted in both historic and contemporary accounts of the composer. Rather, he was the son of one of François's cousins, and belonged to the generation of French harpsichordists, including Royer, Duphly and Balbastre, who pushed the instrument to scintillating (and sometimes exhausting) heights of virtuoso display. Still, he bore the illustrious Couperin name, held significant posts as an organist and was highly esteemed by his contemporaries.

Christophe Rousset's recording of the younger Couperin's harpsichord oeuvre (some 25 pieces grouped into two large key groups, in G and B flat) is the first professional recording of these works. Rousset is an ideal interpreter, with a light, effortless approach and an easy mastery of



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the often cluttered ornamentation, and he has a genuine interpretative affinity for music that can be, at times, too showy for its own substance. These works live more in the idiom of Rameau than that of Couperin's older cousin, with short character pieces that use brilliant effects in service to more or less appealing sketches. In some pieces, the composer explores keyboard technique seemingly for its own purposes (broken parallel octaves in both hands and long passages of arpeggiated figures). In others, including the lovely 'La Chéron', simplicity and harmonic grace accomplish far more than challenging fingerwork.

When he seems most inclined to channel the old-fashioned idiom of the great Couperin, he also produces some of his most lovely music. Rousset serves Couperin well and transparently, making the best possible case for even the most blustery passages. This is an appealing album, despite the reservations registered here. Armand-Louis Couperin wrote for a glorious instrument (and Rousset performs on a magnificently crystalline and precise historic 18th-century harpsichord) at its autumnal efflorescence. The composer held nothing back, and neither does the performer. **Philip Kennicott**

## Dyson

'The Open Window - Complete Music for Piano' Bach's Birthday. Concerto leggiero<sup>a</sup>. Twelve Easy Pieces. Epigrams. Six Lyrics. My Birthday. The Open Window. Prelude and Ballet. Primrose Mount. Four Twilight Preludes. Untitled Piano Piece. Three Wartime Epigrams

**Simon Callaghan**, <sup>a</sup>**Clíodna Shanahan** *pfs*  
Somm ® ② SOMMCD0622-2 (102' • DDD)



The past quarter of a century has brought steady reappraisal of George Dyson (1883-1964), and while an extensive choral output remains his main legacy, his orchestral, chamber and piano pieces should not be overlooked, as Simon Callaghan's *intégrale* of the latter confirms.

Dyson took to composition early, the blithely insouciant 'Untitled Piece' appearing when he was just seven. From the aftermath of the First World War, his *Epigrams* attest to an already fluent pianism. Thereafter he focused on anthologies for younger pianists who should have no greater difficulty with these than, say, the third or fourth books of Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*, with a minor masterpiece in the laconic evocation of the test-piece

*Primrose Mount* (1928). *Four Twilight Preludes* (1920) reflects the sets of character pieces given new levels of subtlety by Bridge and Ireland. Most distinctive, though, is *Bach's Birthday* (1929), four fugues whose sheer brevity belies a rhythmic and tonal finesse to suggest Dyson's remark of 'modern idioms [being] outside the vocabulary of what I want to say' need not be taken at face value.

Callaghan renders these and other solo pieces with a conviction not merely in their technical mastery but their musical worth. Also included here is the two-piano reduction of *Concerto leggiero* (1951), completed after Dyson retired as director of the Royal College of Music and whose neoclassical trenchancy contrasts with a ruminative inwardness that opens out the expressive range of its outer movements. Nor is the absence of strings a real loss, given the alacrity with which Clíodna Shanahan tackles the second piano part (listeners can judge for themselves from Eric Parkin's recording of the orchestral original – Chandos, 8/93).

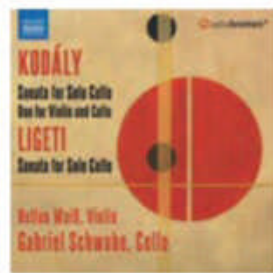
Sound and annotations (by Callaghan) leave nothing to be desired, so making this a desirable purchase for Dyson devotees or those wishing to try out some unfamiliar yet rewarding music. **Richard Whitehouse**

## Kodály · Ligeti

**Kodály** Solo Cello Sonata, Op 8. Duo, Op 7<sup>a</sup>

**Ligeti** Solo Cello Sonata

**Gabriel Schwabe** *vc* <sup>a</sup>**Hellen Weiss** *vn*  
Naxos ® 8 574202 (65' • DDD)



I feel sure that Gabriel Schwabe has the chops and musical intellect to give a great

performance of Kodály's Solo Sonata. What we have on this new Naxos disc is very good, really, if not quite in the top tier. The German-born cellist keeps the big picture more or less in focus; it's just some of the details that are fuzzy. Near the end of the first movement, for example, there's a three-note figure (at 7'32") marked *forte* with a hairpin crescendo and quick diminuendo to *pianissimo*. The same three notes reappear a bar later, now marked *piano* with a slow crescendo, and part of a longer figure with a *sforzando* accent on a fourth note. Yet Schwabe plays these figures more or less the same, ignoring how this motif has been subtly transformed. Or turn to the finale starting at 6'10", where Kodály asks for soft, high tremolo playing marked by whiplash *sforzandos*, below which the cellist plays loud pizzicatos. Schwabe's

*sforzandos* sizzle and his pizzicatos are marvellously sonorous, yet the tremolos are closer to *forte* than *piano*. Turn to Julian Steckel's superb account (AVI-Music, 11/19) to hear how taking the composer at his word makes this passage even more riveting.

Schwabe is at his most impressive in the *Adagio*, where his pacing and concise phrasing give tautness and shape to the expansive structure. Note, say, how beautifully he binds the bowed melody and plucked accompaniment together at 3'20". His relatively relaxed tempo for the *Presto* section of the finale (slower than the metronome mark) allows him to make the most of the music's earthiness, although when heard alongside Steckel, his reading seems to run at a considerably lower voltage.

In the Duo, Schwabe and violinist Hellen Weiss sound very well matched both in tone and temperament, and I very much like the impression of orchestral richness they project at times (as at 3'35" in the first movement), as well as their overarchingly lyrical approach to the work. And sandwiching Ligeti's slender Solo Sonata between the two big Kodály works is a clever bit of programming (Ligeti freely admitted the influence of the elder Hungarian composer, especially in the sonata's songful first movement). Miklós Perényi's interpretation (ECM, 5/12) has greater sweep (and his intensely inky tone makes Schwabe's seem slightly wan) but it's a delight to hear Schwabe make a meal of the second-movement Capriccio. His idea of *Presto* may not be fast but it is furious.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Liszt

**Schwanengesang**: Vierzehn Lieder von Franz Schubert, S560. Quatre Valses oubliées, S215

**Can Çakmur** *pf*

BIS ® BIS2530 (80' • DDD/DSD)



This is Can Çakmur's second album for BIS. The 23-year-old Turkish

pianist's first, which included works by Beethoven-Liszt, Schubert, Haydn, Fazıl Say, Fuyuhiko Sasaki and a truly remarkable Bartók *Out of Doors*, was released last year, hot on the heels of his victory at the 2018 Hamamatsu Competition. This new disc presents his bona fides as a Liszt interpreter, and they are impressive.

The choice to record the entire *Schwanengesang* is an audacious one.



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From desolate imagery to operatic urgency: Can Çakmur plays Liszt's transcriptions of Schubert's *Schwanengesang*

This collection of late Schubert songs was compiled posthumously by the publisher Haslinger. Liszt had played Schubert song transcriptions in his famous Viennese concerts during April and May 1838. They proved so popular that, within a year, he had transcribed another 38 of them, including all 14 of *Schwanengesang*. Individual songs have not left the standard repertory since but it is rare to hear the cycle as a whole. In hands as gifted as Çakmur's, however, their cumulative effect is all but overwhelming.

Çakmur creates his own ordering of the songs, as Liszt himself had done with Haslinger's. The key here, however, is not the progression of moods but the depth and adroitness of their characterisation. They begin with 'Liebesbotschaft', as delicate and ardent a love letter as one can imagine. The impassioned soldier's soliloquy of 'Kriegers Ahnung' shifts seamlessly between anguish and reverie. 'Abschied', conjuring insouciant leave-taking of the familiar, is paired with 'In der Ferne', and the chill of having left without farewell or blessing. Stark, desolate, terrifying imagery is evoked in pieces like 'Die Stadt', 'Doppelgänger' and 'Der Atlas', while others such as 'Ständchen' and 'Taubenpost' are lent

an operatic urgency and dimension without sacrificing their essential simplicity. In each instance Çakmur's conception is vividly persuasive and the pianistic wherewithal abetting his vision secure.

The four *Valses oubliées*, composed between 1881 and 1884, provide the perfect pendant to the Schubert settings from four decades earlier. Most striking are Çakmur's sane tempos. In contrast to the breakneck speed usual for these pieces, he follows Liszt's indications and opts for tempos that are actually danceable. Only the second and third waltzes bear a dedication, both to Olga von Meyendorff, Liszt's close Weimar companion in later years, and this may account for the gentle tenderness enveloping Çakmur's readings. The first waltz exhibits luscious *pianissimo* and *legato leggiero*, while the slightly antic second has a lovely music-box quality with all attendant rhythmic subtlety. Meanwhile, the delightfully playful third waltz creates a magic all its own.

Given the wealth and range of his musical imagination, not to mention his genuine pianistic gifts, I believe Can Çakmur is someone from whom we can confidently and happily expect to hear a great deal more. **Patrick Rucker**

## Schumann

'Einsam'

Arabeske, Op 18. Kinderszenen, Op 15.

Kreisleriana, Op 16. Romance, Op 28 No 2.

Vogel als Prophet, Op 82 No 7

**Nino Gvetadze** *pf*

Challenge Classics © CC72855 (67' • DDD)



Now based in Amsterdam, Nino Gvetadze was born in Tbilisi and trained

in her native Georgia before continuing her studies at the conservatories of The Hague and Amsterdam. She won prizes at the 2008 International Franz Liszt Competition and is a recipient of the Borletti-Buitoni Award. Though she already boasts a considerable discography, this was my introduction to her work.

The *Arabeske* ripples and floats with enviable calm without straining after effect, all the while imparting a delicate sense of longing. The apt voicing of textures is particularly striking. Since Nicholas Angelich's fine 2016 recording (Erato, 7/16), I don't know when I've enjoyed a *Kreisleriana* quite so much. Filled with robust contrasts and with exquisitely



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Personality and experience: Daniel Barenboim has recorded Beethoven's piano sonatas for the fifth time

### Beethoven

Complete Piano Sonatas.

Diabelli Variations, Op 120

**Daniel Barenboim** *pf*

DG © 13 483 9320 (14h 49' • DDD/ADD)

Includes two discs of sonatas (Nos 8, 14, 21, 23, 29 & 32) recorded 1958/59 for the Westminster label



Most of us seem to have spent much of lockdown earlier this year failing to get anywhere with optimistic to-do lists. But Daniel Barenboim isn't, of course, most people, so it should come as no surprise that the 77-year-old spent it recording his fifth cycle of the Beethoven sonatas in the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin. And throwing in the *Diabellis* for good measure. Intriguingly, this set also includes two discs of sonata recordings made for Westminster in March 1958. But more on that anon.

How to sum up such an undertaking? Well, it's certainly a mixed bag. Barenboimites will need no encouragement to add it to their collections alongside his earlier surveys. But for the rest of us, frankly, there are caveats. These readings are, as you'd expect, big on personality and long on experience: Barenboim's love

and respect for Beethoven is apparent in every bar. But does that make up for the physical frailty that inevitably dogs some of the more demanding writing?

It's striking how consistent Barenboim's approach has been over the decades, tending towards the monumental in slow movements, contrasting this with tremendous energy in quicker movements. Take the Third Sonata, Op 2 No 3, for instance. The second movement is pretty drawn out, closer to a *largo* than an *adagio*, but these days the technical difficulties posed by the Scherzo – here more strenuous than playful – and the infamous thirds-and-sixths-infused finale prove a distraction. I'm afraid that issue runs through the entire set and the movements that come off best tend to be the ones at moderate tempos. The theme-and-variation opening of Op 26, for instance, where Barenboim revels in inventive characterisation; he's also effective in the funeral march of the same sonata, which doesn't fall into the trap of being too slow. The *Tempo d'un menuetto* of Op 54 works well, with Barenboim bringing a real intimacy to its opening. The *Moonlight* begins promisingly, too, with a nice sheen to the first movement and an *Allegretto* which is limpid in effect. But the *Presto* is afflicted by unsteadiness and unruly accentuation. Fascinatingly, in this sonata

and a handful of others, we can compare the Barenboim of today with his 15-year-old self thanks to the inclusion of two bonus discs. Strikingly, the *Moonlight's* first movement is slower in 1958; and while the *Allegretto* is at a similar pace, it has a perkier alertness to the phrasing. The finale is drier and arguably too fast but technically irreproachable.

How to convey the dramatic extremes of Beethoven's music is a subject that has long fascinated Barenboim, and the *Waldstein* is a good example – in both early and new accounts the slow-movement 'Introduzione' is very drawn out. The teenage Barenboim goes hell for leather in the first movement – faster than the zippy Igor Levit (Sony, A19) – but the latest version is far more portly, tempo-wise. And the finale, once so slick and easy, now sounds like serious hard work. More problematic still is the *Hammerklavier*: the youthful account is predictably high on chutzpah, though the slow movement is (understandably) not particularly profound. The new account lacks tension from the off, the corners sound as if they have been smoothed off and by the closing pages of the epic fugal finale the effect is shattered rather than shattering.

There are two accounts of Op 111 as well, and again it's striking how many elements in the mature Barenboim are already there in his much younger self. The slow introduction is *maestoso* indeed – too much so for my taste (I much prefer the tautness of Steven Osborne's vision here, the dotted opening possessing an underlying pulse that eludes Barenboim). And there's an aggression to the accentation in the *Allegro con brio* which has become more extreme with time. The Arietta theme is slower in the new account and Beethoven's final leave-taking of the sonata is more drawn out than previously.

The *Diabellis* were a brave addition and Barenboim sets off at a purposeful pace, accents nicely observed. You have to admire his refusal to take the more manic variations (such as Nos 10, 15, 19, 27 and 28) at too sedate a pace but that can result in the need for emergency rubato. And by the time he reaches the fugue (Var 32), a strenuousness has crept in.

Anne-Sophie Mutter writes a warm essay about Barenboim and Beethoven, while Julia Spinola's note talks of Barenboim's latest cycle having 'exceptional vitality, clarity, subtle differentiation and precision'; to be honest these were not qualities I encountered except very fleetingly. Approach with caution. **G**



sculpted phrasing throughout, Gvetadze's sensitivity to Schumann's vaunted 'inner voices' is unsurpassed.

Despite the myriad challenges of *Kreisleriana* so successfully met, it may well be that the true heart of this release is Gvetadze's delicate *Kinderszenen*. From the unaffected, deeply felt tenderness of 'Von fremden Ländern und Menschen' and the fleet, cheerful clarity of 'Hasche-Mann', through the subtle dynamics of 'Wichtige Begebenheit' or the direct simplicity of 'Träumerei', which sounds more sung than played, each piece is a little gem. In addition to Gvetadze's extraordinarily varied colour palette, much of the naturalness and beauty of her *cantabile* playing is achieved through expert rhythmic placement. The qualities so amply evident in *Kinderszenen* also illuminate 'The Prophet Bird' and the F sharp major Romance, each a study in understatement.

Gvetadze's focus is unerring and, if the expressive content of the music is always front and centre, she also has an uncanny ability to elucidate the overall structure with immense subtlety. If you don't yet know her playing, great pleasures await.

Patrick Rucker

## Thalberg

*L'art du chant appliqué au piano*, Op 70.  
Auf Flügeln des Gesanges (Mendelssohn).  
Mi manca la voce (from Rossini's 'Mosè in Egitto'). Three Schubert Lieder, Op 79a

Paul Wee *pf*

BIS (F) (two discs for the price of one) BIS2515  
(139' • DDD/DSD)



*L'art du chant appliqué au piano* consists of 26 numbers published in four volumes

between 1853 and 1863, each containing either six or seven arrangements from the song, opera or choral repertoire. These arrangements are not of the same order as those with which Thalberg dazzled audiences and is most commonly associated – the *Fantaisies* on Rossini's *Moses* and Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, for example. Here, he seeks to charm rather than astound. His very different and specific aim is to use the music of other composers as a means of developing the expressive powers of the piano, to turn it from a percussive instrument into one 'through skill and artifice', as Thalberg wrote in his introduction, '[to] produce the illusion of *sustained* and *prolonged* sounds, [and] also that of *swelling* sounds' (his italics).

Paul Wee, whose thrilling debut recording of Alkan's Concerto for solo piano created such a stir (11/19), is only the second pianist to record the complete Op 70, and this is the only version currently available. That in itself makes this a most welcome addition to the catalogue, though it is not something to listen to from beginning to end in a single sitting. First, Thalberg never intended it to be heard in that way; second, after a while, a certain sameness of texture, tempo and character is apparent – far better to sample a few at a time; and third, Wee, while ever the keyboard poet, does not invest every number with the same level of engagement or imagination: there are instances (notably in a couple of numbers in series 1 and 2) where he goes little further than reading from the piano rack.

The vast majority of performances, however, are revelatory, and must be the envy of many a full-time professional. In those numbers that have been recorded by others, Wee's playing equals or surpasses them, the most popular being a case in point – the clever arrangement of the 'Lacrimosa' from Mozart's Requiem. Often it is those numbers that are deceptively difficult that bring out the best in him: 'Adelaide' (Beethoven), for instance, 'Il mio tesoro' (from *Don Giovanni*) and 'Fröhliche Klänge, Tänze, Gesänge' (from *Euryanthe*).

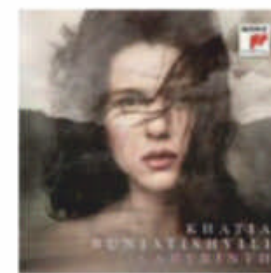
Disc 2 is completed with transcriptions of three Schubert lieder, Mendelssohn's 'Auf Flügeln des Gesanges' and the ingenious version of the quartet 'Mi manca la voce' from Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto*. Whatever one's niggles over *L'art du chant*, the playing here is so magically good that I would buy this set just for these final five items. BIS packages the two discs in a box to accommodate the lengthy and superb booklet in three languages by the pianist. Wee has shown in this beautifully recorded release (producer Andrew Keener and engineer David Hinitt) that Thalberg is a far more important composer for the piano than current opinion would have it.

Jeremy Nicholas

## 'Labyrinth'

**JS Bach** Concertos: BWV596 (after Vivaldi) – Sicilienne; BWV974 (after Marcello) – Adagio. **Orchestral Suites**: No 2, BWV1067 – Badinerie<sup>a</sup>; No 3, BWV1068 – Air on the G String **Brahms** Intermezzo, Op 118 No 2 **Cage** 4'33" **Chopin** Prelude, Op 28 No 4 **F Couperin** Les barricades mystérieuses **Gainsbourg** La Javanaise **Glass** I'm Going to Make a Cake **Ligeti** Étude No 5, 'Arc-en-ciel' **Liszt** Consolation, S172 No 3 **Morricone** Once Upon a Time in America – Deborah's Theme **Pärt** *Pari intervallo*<sup>a</sup> **Rachmaninov** Vocalise, Op 34 No 14

**Satie** *Gymnopédie No 1* **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonata, K32 **Villa-Lobos** Valsa da dor **Khatia Buniatishvili**, <sup>a</sup>**Gvantsa Buniatishvili** *pf*  
Sony Classical (F) 19439 79577-2;  
(F) (2) (F) 19439 79577-1 (79' • DDD)



Khatia Buniatishvili is a pianist of extremes. She has fantastic fingers, a charismatic

stage presence, a warm, glowing tone and strongly expressed ideas. A number of concerto performances on YouTube leave you in no doubt about her phenomenal gifts. But, too often, she makes strange, unsupportable musical decisions. Try her live (online) Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 2, for example, a display that does neither Liszt nor Buniatishvili any favours. And then turn to the present recording.

Some of the pieces she has chosen, the majority of which are quiet and reflective in character, are played so slowly that you wonder if the pianist has dozed off. Everything stops mid-phrase. Nothing is happening. The opening 'Deborah's Theme' (from *Once Upon a Time in America*) is tortuously elongated, so that all semblance of its essential vocal line disappears. In a short piece such as Liszt's *Consolation* No 3, the difference of a whole minute's longer duration compared to Freire, Barenboim, Arrau and Horowitz (all about 4'25") is redolent of mannered self-indulgence, while the sparse texture and long lines of Arvo Pärt's *Pari intervallo* cannot possibly support such a snail's pace. Elsewhere, Chopin's E minor Prelude and the transcription of 'Vocalise' open plaintively but are then driven to emotional climaxes quite alien to their original design. Most irritating of all is the inclusion of John Cage's 4'33", conceivably interesting in the concert hall but not on a CD.

Then you get little gems that show Buniatishvili at her best: a heartbreaking account of the Marcello-Bach *Adagio*, a straightforward (and thus infinitely more effective) *Gymnopédie* No 1, the delicious and unexpected choices of Serge Gainsbourg's 'La Javanaise', Villa-Lobos's *Valsa da dor* and, best of all, the Sicilienne from the Vivaldi-Bach Concerto in D minor, BWV596. Sticking out like a sore thumb is the only upbeat number, an arrangement (by Buniatishvili) of the Badinerie from BWV1067, a duet with her older sister Gvantsa lasting all of 1'20". This strange album, not one to lift the spirits in these dismal days, is accompanied by a booklet that should go straight to Pseuds Corner. **Jeremy Nicholas**



# Errollyn Wallen

Pwyll ap Siôn profiles the British-Caribbean composer who's a true force to be reckoned with and has found her own path in music

An influential figure and inspirational role model for young musicians, respected and admired by fellow composers and performers, and recognised by the pillars of the British musical establishment, Errollyn Wallen is a leading figure in today's classical music world. But the journey that she has taken has been nothing if not unconventional. Indeed, it could never have been any other way.

She was born in Belize, and at the age of two moved to London with her parents. She became a musician almost by accident, owing to the fact that she came from a musical family: her father was a fine amateur singer who wrote songs and introduced his young daughter to jazz, blues and the recordings of Ella Fitzgerald. Being a keen dancer, Wallen first experienced classical music at a ballet class when an accompanist suddenly started playing Chopin. She was absolutely mesmerised and immediately set about exploring classical music – in both its traditional and its more contemporary forms.

*She has evolved a distinctive style that synthesises classical and pop elements without tired clichés and mannerisms*

Piano lessons with Edith Vogel during the 1970s taught Wallen about the importance of shaping time, and her early influences were Bach, Beethoven and Stravinsky – composers who possessed an innate ability to turn music into a living, breathing form by channelling its harmonic undercurrents and rhythmic flow. Studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s at (what was then known as) Goldsmiths College, London, with Melanie Daiken and then at King's College London with Nicola LeFanu introduced Wallen to the rigours of compositional method and technique. LeFanu had been a pupil of Egon Wellesz, and thus represented a direct line back to Schoenberg. Wallen soaked it all up but nevertheless eventually realised that this was not her only music nor her only musical tradition, that she needed to create a language that could find a place also for the music of her childhood and background, which she did not wish to disown – a language that could embrace Bach and the blues, Beethoven and jazz.

Wallen's reassessment of her musical identity occurred at a time when new music was undergoing its own crisis. The influence and impact of non-Western forms and popular cultures on styles such as minimalism were changing the landscape. The effect of this can be heard in early Wallen pieces written for Graham Fitkin's two-pianos eight-hands ensemble Nanquidno, such as *Big Business* (1988) and



Wallen lives by her maxim, 'Every composer has to work out their own path in music'

*The Girl in my Alphabet* (1990), the latter finally quoting from 'The Girl from Ipanema' after taking a wild musical walk via Nancarrow's player piano studies, Dave Grusin's smooth jazz and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

Nevertheless, large parts of the old order remained closed off to those who weren't white, male and British. 'It was made quite clear to me that I didn't belong to the classical music establishment,' she reflects. 'People still see my colour before they even know to show any interest in the work I've done.'

A teacher once walked up to the nine-year-old Wallen as she played the violin in the school orchestra and said, apropos of nothing: 'You know, little girl ... this music *isn't* for you.' Wallen says: 'I don't know what she was doing, but she just came right up to me and said it.' Such shocking put-downs aside, it was the stony white wall of silence that in many respects proved the most unsettling. Wallen points out that 'so little was expected of me', but her career has been not so much about proving others wrong as a case of proving herself right.

Adopting the approach that 'every composer has to work out their own path in music', she has evolved a distinctive style that synthesises classical and pop elements without the tired clichés and mannerisms that one often finds. Her music can be divided into large-scale 'landscape' compositions, operas, chamber music and more smorgasbord-like works such as song-cycles and suites. Examples of the last category are the half-serious, half-humorous song-cycle set to her own text *Are You Worried about the Rising Cost of Funerals? (Five Simple Songs)* (1994), for voice and string quartet, and the instrumental ensemble work in four movements *Horseplay* (1998), with its infectious dancelike rhythms.

The landscape works lend themselves especially to the broader palette of large ensembles and orchestras. These include works such as the aforementioned *The Girl in my*





## WALLEN FACTS

**Born** Belize, April 10, 1958

**Studies** Goldsmiths College, London (BMus, 1981), King's College London (MMus, 1983) and King's College, Cambridge (MPhil, 2000)

**Breakthrough work**

Percussion Concerto (1994)

**Awards** BBC Radio 3 Listeners' Award at the British Composer Awards (2005), MBE (2007) and CBE (2020) for services to music, and Ivor Novello Award for Classical Music (2013)

*Alphabet, Hunger* (1996), for chamber orchestra, and *Mighty River* (2007), which was written to mark the bicentenary of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. Dedicated to her great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, the work includes excerpts from hymns and spiritual songs, including 'Amazing Grace', 'Deep River' and 'Go Down Moses', and the

journey of the river is used by Wallen to signify hope and the 'innate human instinct to be free'.

Recently, Wallen has shown her support for the Black Lives Matter movement by harmonising and arranging Johnnetta Bryant's song for her son Keedron Bryant, 'I Just Wanna Live'. Wallen scored it for string quintet: violinists Nicola and Stephanie Benedetti and Braimah Kanneh-Mason, and cellists Grace Chatto (of Clean Bandit) and Sheku Kanneh-Mason. Others of her works that mark important historical figures and events include *In our Lifetime* (1990), for baritone and tape, which honours Nelson Mandela and his fight against apartheid in South Africa, and the choral symphony *Carbon 12* (2008), commissioned by Welsh National Opera to highlight the struggle of Welsh coalmining communities.

The concerto form has also held particular fascination for Wallen, who points out that 'a composer can have a lot of fun with it'. Her enjoyment in writing for it is particularly evident in the exuberant Percussion Concerto (1994), which marked her arrival as a composer. Premiered by Colin Currie in the 1994 BBC Young Musician of the Year finals, it juxtaposes sweeping big-band-like statements in the brass with atmospheric moments on the vibraphone allied with shimmering effects on the marimba. Latin American rhythms gatecrash the party in the final movement before being swept along by infectious blues-style chord patterns. The Cello Concerto (2007) is a very different work, demonstrating the extent and breadth of Wallen's style. The opening cello cadenza returns at the end in an altogether different guise. The energetic, pocket-sized four-movement Concerto grosso (2008) has also proved exceptionally popular, and was recently released by Chineke! on its 'Spark Catchers' album (NMC, 5/20).

A large portion of Wallen's output consists of vocal music, either written for herself in a more pop-based context, such as

on the seminal 1998 album 'Meet Me at Harold Moores' and the eponymous solo album 'Errollyn' (2004), or for the more operatic voices of singers such as Patricia Rozario, Alwyn Mellor and Golda Schultz. To date, she has composed 18 operas, collaborating with a range of writers as well as writing her own librettos. Many of the songs written for herself appear in *The Errollyn Wallen Songbook* (Edition Peters). Schultz (who sang in 'Jerusalem – our Clouded Hills', Wallen's arrangement of Parry's 'Jerusalem' for this year's Last Night of the Proms) is due to appear in the premiere of Wallen's forthcoming opera *Dido's Ghost* (to a libretto by Wesley Stace) at Milton Court in the Barbican, London, in June 2021, and featuring the Dunedin Consort. (*Dido's Lament* is a personal favourite of Wallen, who sings it on the track 'In Earth' on the album 'Photography'.)

The lyrical qualities of Wallen's vocal style are vividly captured on the album 'Peace on Earth'. Recorded in June 2019 by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, under the direction of the late Stephen Cleobury, the three-track digital release provides a tantalising glimpse into Wallen's musical world – gritty in the Brittenesque 'See that I am God' (2014), strangely ethereal in 'Pace' (2017), calm and restful in the beautiful 'Peace on Earth' (2006).

In a career that has spanned some 30 years, Wallen has been a pioneer. She was the first black female composer to have a piece performed at the BBC Proms (in 1998), and the first to have been commissioned by the Royal Opera House (in 2003, for the opera *Another America: Earth*). And in 2013, she became the first woman to receive the Ivor Novello Award for Classical Music. The recent announcement of her appointment as Visiting Professor of Composition at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland also marks another significant first.

To come first is not without its problems, however, and in Wallen's case one is faced with the more basic question: what *really* comes first? The composer, or her colour? Her music, or her gender? It is often easy to lose sight of the fact that music should always come first. Unlike people, music does not discriminate against race, gender or ethnicity. We would do well to follow suit. **G**

## WALLEN IN RECORDINGS

A broad range of works to showcase her diversity



**'The Girl in my Alphabet'**

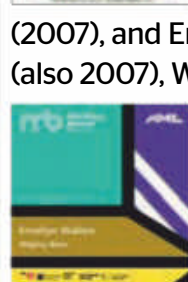
Errollyn Wallen *pf* Continuum Ens / Philip Headlam et al  
Avie (7/02)



Featuring a diverse range of compositions for vocal and instrumental forces, this is an excellent introduction to Wallen's energetic and exciting early style.

**'Photography - Orchestral Works'**

Errollyn Wallen *voc* Ensemble X / Nicholas Kok et al  
NMC (6/16)



This album covers early as well as more recent works. The excellent Matthew Sharp plays the Cello Concerto (2007), and Ensemble X gives a lively rendition of *Photography* (also 2007), Wallen's Baroque-inspired suite for string orchestra.

**'Mighty River'**

Orchestra X / Andrew Morley  
NMC

This composition, in Wallen's more direct and accessible style, is heard here in a live performance by her own group.



# Vocal



**Andrew Achenbach** welcomes a survey of Vaughan Williams's folk songs:

*'Roderick Williams is suitably rollicking, Mary Bevan ravishes the ear and Nicky Spence displays a personable empathy'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



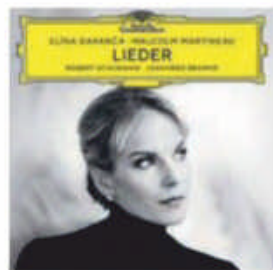
**Alexandra Coghlan** enjoys two albums from a London school choir:

*'They are impressively well blended, the bright, top-line sound balanced to and shaped by the lighter lower voices'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 88**

## Brahms • Schumann

**Brahms** Sechs Lieder, Op 3 - No 1, Liebestreu; No 3, Liebe und Frühling II. Vier Lieder, Op 43 - No 1, Von ewiger Liebe; No 2, Die Mainacht. Fünf Lieder, Op 72 - No 1, Alte Liebe; No 3, O kühler Wald; No 4, Verzagen. Geheimnis, Op 71 No 3. Heimweh, Op 63 No 8. Mädchenlied, Op 107 No 5. O liebliche Wangen, Op 47 No 4. Sapphische Ode, Op 94 No 4. Wir wandelten, Op 96 No 2 **Schumann** Frauenliebe und -leben, Op 42

**Elīna Garanča** *mez* **Malcolm Martineau** *pf*  
DG 483 9210 (587' • DDD • T/t)



DG's publicity blurb for this album describes it as 'both a debut and a proof

of musical pedigree'. It's the Latvian star mezzo's first disc of lieder, yes, and it's fascinating – especially after tracing the idea's history in the book *German Song Onstage* (11/20) – to see the performance of song portrayed as a stamp of artistic quality. As such, Garanča certainly goes about the task with admirable earnestness: she's well behaved, serious, tasteful.

Nevertheless, with her slightly accented German and unstintingly rich, chocolatey tone, there's a sense of a fine artist finding her feet in a genre where she's not yet quite at home. The singing is undoubtedly impressive, the manner redolent of an age where opera and song were less clearly delineated. But the characterisation is a touch generalised and slightly cool, with, in the Schumann, little of the lived emotion and urgency you get, for example, with Dorothea Röschmann's superb 2015 account with Mitsuko Uchida (Decca, 12/15).

Singing in low keys that are perhaps more matronly than maidenly, the mezzo is often either interpretatively conservative or, as when we get a seductively breathy final 'wie so gut!' at the close of an enjoyably heroic 'Er, der Herrlichste von allen', occasionally operatic. Still, there are moving moments: the glorious passage

at the heart of 'Süsser freund, du blickest' (from 'Weisst du nun, die Tränen ...' at 2'05") has a stirring nobility, and there's a real tragic grandeur to 'Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan'.

It's a similar story with her Brahms, where the singing is impressive but where one misses the interpretative colour and variation of such mezzos as Anne Sofie von Otter and Bernarda Fink, who cover much of the same repertoire more movingly on their now-classic Brahms albums. Nevertheless, the sheer weight Garanča and Malcolm Martineau – providing excellent support throughout – bring to 'Liebestreu' is exciting, the grandeur of 'Die Mainacht' and 'Von ewiger Liebe' impressive.

There's plenty of pleasure to be had here, then, even if some of it is a little guilty. While Garanča's musical pedigree is in little doubt, though, there are others on disc who better show how to unlock the real emotional power of this repertoire.

**Hugo Shirley**

## Britten

A Ceremony of Carols<sup>a</sup>. Saint Nicolas<sup>b</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Mark Le Brocq *ten* <sup>a</sup>Sally Pryce *hp* <sup>b</sup>Coldfall

Primary School Choir; <sup>b</sup>Hannah Brine Choirs;

<sup>b</sup>Members of Hertfordshire Chorus; Crouch

End Festival Chorus; <sup>b</sup>BBC Concert Orchestra /

<sup>ab</sup>David Temple

Signum 483 9210 (71' • DDD • T)



Conceived on board the MS *Axel Johnson* during Britten's hazardous return

voyage from North America to the UK in 1942, *A Ceremony of Carols* receives supremely enjoyable advocacy here. David Temple presides over a finely nuanced rendering of Britten's captivating sequence, beautifully engineered in East Finchley's All Saints' Church, while harpist Sally Pryce reprises her role on Stephen Layton's 2007 recording (Hyperion, 12/12) to exquisite effect.

Thoroughly commendable as this newcomer is, though, I'm bound to say that the sopranos and altos of Layton's exceptional Trinity College Chapel Choir have the edge over their north London rivals in terms of purity of intonation and unruffled composure.

Likewise, there's formidable competition from Layton in the 1947-48 cantata *Saint Nicolas*. Temple directs with purposeful vigour, eliciting admirably spick and span, notably enthusiastic results from his choral and orchestral team (amateur and professional alike); Mark Le Brocq is an ardent exponent of the title-role. What's more, there's no disputing the infectious community spirit and festive splendour on display (commissioned to celebrate the centenary of Lancing College in Sussex, the work was actually premiered at the inaugural concert of the very first Aldeburgh Festival in June 1948). Excellent sound, too, emanating from Alexandra Palace's refurbished Victorian Theatre. When push comes to shove, however, Layton has an ace up his sleeve in Allan Clayton (one of our most perceptive Britten interpreters, heard at his best in 'Nicolas devotes himself to God'). And don't forget, either, the composer's own mono version (Decca, 7/55) featuring Peter Pears at the peak of his powers – a remarkable document that still conveys a unique sense of occasion and emotional charge across the decades.

**Andrew Achenbach**

## Bruckner

Mass No 2. Ave Maria. Christus factus est. Ecce sacerdos magnus. Locus iste. Tota pulchra es. Virga Jesse

**The Choir of King's College, Cambridge; Academy of St Martin in the Fields / Sir Stephen Cleobury**

with **Dónal McCann, Henry Websdale** *org*

King's College 483 9210 (57' • DDD • T/t)

## Bruckner

Mass No 2. Te Deum

**Collegium Vocale Gent; Champs-Élysées**

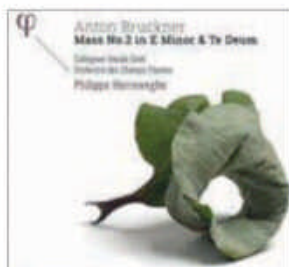
**Orchestra / Philippe Herreweghe**

PHI 483 9210 (52' • DDD • T/t)





Rich, chocolatey tone: Elina Garanča sings Brahms and Schumann on her first album of lieder, superbly supported by Malcolm Martineau



Soon after welcoming the Pentatone release of Bruckner's E minor Mass conducted by Gijs Leenaars (A/20), here are two more for collectors to choose from. The version by the King's College Choir was the final recording made by their music director of 37 years, Stephen Cleobury, before his death last November. In an appreciation in the booklet note, Iain Fenlon, Cleobury's longtime colleague at King's College, notes that among the conductor's concerns during his last days were listening to Wagner's *Ring* cycle and completing the final edit of this recording. A feature that sets Cleobury's version apart from most other recordings is the use of boys' voices for the soprano and alto parts, heard immediately in the haunting *a cappella* opening of the *Kyrie*, the trebles sounding strikingly pure and radiant. It's not an inappropriate choice given the liturgical nature of the piece and the composer's own history as a boy chorister at the Monastery of St Florian, although we know that

Bruckner used female voices when he conducted the premiere in Linz in 1869. Another feature of Cleobury's recording is the fleetness of the interpretation, the performance lasting around 32 minutes compared to 37' for Layton (a former student of Cleobury's at King's) and 43' for Jochum. I never felt that the performance was too fast, however, the choice of tempos throughout in keeping with the freshness of the approach and the modest scale of the forces employed.

Cleobury prefaces the performance of the Mass with a stirring account of *Ecce sacerdos magnus*, where the choir is accompanied by organ and three trombones, with the other five motets following after. These are performed with a similar combination of vitality and dedication, and the recording throughout is first class.

Philippe Herreweghe's first recording of the Mass in E minor was made in 1989 with the combined vocal forces of Collegium Vocale and La Chappelle Royale. Thirty years on, Herreweghe's conception of the work is remarkably similar, although tempos are now faster than before, the overall running time shorter by a minute than even Cleobury's recording. Although I don't find this

problematic in itself, the clarity and objectivity of Herreweghe's approach results in a somewhat uninvolved experience, especially when compared with the versions by Layton or Rilling, which convey so well the deeper emotions of the piece. Although not indicated as a live recording, the ring of a mobile phone provides a startling intrusion at 3'43" in the *Sanctus*.

Dating from 2012, the performance of the *Te Deum* is, by contrast, powerful and stirring. As with the Mass, Herreweghe's tempos are notably swifter than most other conductors, but both singers and orchestra sound thoroughly committed and the performance communicates excitement and a sense of the elemental. Whereas the Mass was recorded in the Philharmonie in Essen, the *Te Deum* was set down at KKL Luzern and enjoys a slightly warmer and more spacious sound, albeit not always entirely transparent in louder passages. Once again, strong competition comes from Rilling's performance, but Herreweghe's account of the *Te Deum* is very fine indeed.

#### Christian Hoskins

*Mass No 2 – selected comparison:*

*Polyphony, Layton (11/07) (HYPE) CDA67629*

*Mass No 2, Te Deum – selected comparison:*

*Bach Collegium Stuttgart, Rilling (HANS) CD98 054*



## Handel

Messiah, HWV56

Julia Doyle *sop* Tim Mead *countertenor*

Thomas Hobbs *ten* Roderick Williams *bar*

RIAS Chamber Choir; Akademie für Alte

Musik Berlin / Justin Doyle

Pentatone ② PTC5186 853 (134' • DDD • T)



An Anglo-German partnership is fitting for Handel, and here we have the RIAS

Kammerchor Berlin under their English conductor with the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin and an appetising quartet of British soloists (including the conductor's sister) coming together to run their talents over one of the most familiar of Herr Händel's works.

What do they come up with? Well, the Akademie are simply one of the world's finest baroque orchestras, technically immaculate but also with a distinctive woody strength to their sound; just as in their recent Handel Op 6 recordings (10/19, 4/20), it is great to hear inner lines emerging from time to time with sinewy self-confidence. And they are terrific in agitated music such as 'Why do the nations rage' or the 'refiner's fire' section of 'But who may abide', and give a firm bucolic dignity to the Pifa.

The soloists, too, are great to listen to. Julia Doyle has a voice of bewitching clarity, with an uncomplicated grace and precision that recalls early Carolyn Sampson. She shows a hint of fragility, too, in 'I know that my redeemer liveth' that adds to its touching effect. Tim Mead is a superb countertenor whose richly lyrical voice, almost like a contralto in places, has not a weak note in it, and is a constant pleasure to hear. Thomas Hobbs, after a strangely tired-sounding 'Ev'ry valley', beguiles with his toffeed tenor, and Roderick Williams, while sometimes treading carefully through passagework, is an effortless master of the drama in recitative and aria alike. Yet, odd as it may seem given the excellence of this singing, all four of them are just that little bit too present in the balance for either realism or true comfort.

Or rather, they are just too present compared to the choir, who, as a result, and good as they are, lack the focus and punch we are used to from British, male-altoed choirs. But perhaps Justin Doyle has a hand in this. Right from his smooth-sided Overture it is clear that he is keen to avoid overloading the oratorio with bombast by holding things back in places, the better to

release his forces more effectively elsewhere. Sometimes – indeed perhaps a little too often – he lets things flag too much, as in the disappointingly low-key ending to 'His yoke is easy' or the surprisingly joyless 'O thou that tellest'. In other places he judges it shrewdly; the performance hits its stride in the choral sequences of Part 2, for instance, probing their contours and contrasts for dramatic effect and culminating in a thrillingly manipulated 'Hallelujah'. Perhaps the single most effective example of Doyle's controlled approach, however, is the refreshingly gently unpompous 'The trumpet shall sound', where joy and wonder are instead allowed their heads most freely in the ornaments Williams lets loose in the *da capo*.

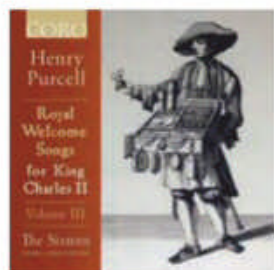
This, then, is a *Messiah* of good performances, but in the end it needs its many nice new ideas to cohere more consistently to make it a top recommendation among so many strong rivals. **Lindsay Kemp**

## Purcell

'Royal Welcome Songs for King Charles II, Vol 3' Blow, Boreas, blow, Z589. Chaconne 'Two in one upon a ground', Z627. Close thine eyes and sleep secure, Z184. Come, my hearts, play your parts, Z246. From those serene and rapturous joys, Z326. O all ye people, clap your hands, Z138. O praise the Lord, all ye heathen, Z43. Overture, Z771. Rejoice in the Lord alway, Z49. Retir'd from any mortal's sight, Z581. Thy genius, lo!, Z604. What shall be done in behalf of the man?, Z341

The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

Coro ② COR16182 (74' • DDD • T)



This well-constructed programme gets off to a charming start with *Rejoice in the Lord*

*alway*, in which Purcell acknowledges his debt to the French style and (in the instrumental introduction) imitates bell-ringing. The vocal soloists sound comfortable and focused here, as in the other sacred pieces. They are naturally more extrovert in the theatrical pieces, though prone as a result to showing rough edges, which a lower pitch-level might have alleviated. The bass, Ben Davies, turns in the most solid and secure performances, including in the Welcome Songs.

Ah, the Welcome Songs ... That Purcell managed to conjure up anything worth hearing is remarkable; the only way to do justice to the drivel he was given to set would have been to toss it in the bin.

As it is, *What shall be done in behalf of the man?* is hardly his most inspired work. *From those serene and rapturous joys* is better, though neither is a match for the finest of the early odes, *Fly, bold rebellion* (included on a previous volume of this series – 7/18). The Sixteen's string band is more than twice the size of the one Robert King used in his complete survey for Hyperion 30 years ago. Its sound is not much bigger but less astringent and (to my ear) agile, though some may prefer its statelier outlook. But it's no disrespect to Harry Christophers's soloists to say that they're not in the same league as King's stellar cast. Christophers's response to the musical text is also less acute: when the violins summon up the bass soloist with dotted rhythms at 'Behold the indulgent prince is come', there is no noticeable quickening of pace to spur them on, as in the earlier set. The continuo group contribute some neat touches, however. **Fabrice Fitch**

## Sheppard

A solis ortus cardine. Confitebor tibi. Deus misereatur. Inclina Domine. Iudica me Deus. Media vita. Sacris solemniis

Choir of New College Oxford / Robert Quinney

Linn ② CKD632 (72' • DDD • T/t)



There are many reasons why this new release from the Choir of

New College Oxford directed by Robert Quinney will not disappoint, and chief among them are four premiere recordings and a consistently radiant sound with confident, purposeful phrasing. The selection begins with earlier cantus firmus works, a medium in which Sheppard is pleasingly extrovert. The opening hymn *A solis ortis cardine* creates a powerful start to the programme, with the choir's blazing full sound matching the expansiveness of both text and music.

I have always admired the confident, unfussy tone of New College's trebles and the sound on this new album, in my opinion, connects back to a much older recording of Byrd's *In resurrectione tua* (CRD, 4/84, 12/91) made in the bright acoustic of their college chapel. While this new recording appears to honour that bold sound, even in the more resonant surroundings of St Michael's Summertown, balance-wise it occasionally throws a spotlight on the tenors who – despite sounding glorious – are overly prominent for my tastes.





Blazing full sound: the Choir of New College Oxford are resplendant in the music of John Sheppard

There is much to enjoy in the contrast between upper and lower sonorities in the next motet, *Inclina Domine*, which has a ravishing false relation as well as the most spectacular ‘Amen’. Yet it is the second hymn, *Sacris solemniis* (already well known from The Tallis Scholars – Gimell, 1/90), that stands out as a particular achievement. Notable hallmarks of Sheppard’s spacious style are the wide-spread chords at cadences, which the Choir of New College sing with relish.

Finally, it is pleasing to hear Sheppard’s monumental *Media vita* sounding so rich and full, with a memorable countertenor sound. Sad, perhaps, that in our current pandemic the text ‘in the midst of life we are in death’ should strike us so poignantly but thrilling to hear such young voices do justice to one of Sheppard’s finest works.

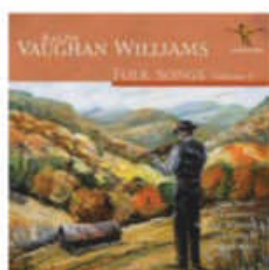
Edward Breen

## Vaughan Williams

‘Folk Songs, Vol 1’

Folk Songs from Sussex. Six English Folk Songs. Sea Songs from The Motherland Song Book, Vol 4

Mary Bevan *sop* Nicky Spence *ten* Roderick Williams *bar* Jack Liebeck *vn* William Vann *pf*  
Albion © ALBCD042 (69’ • DDD • T)



Albion Records has assembled a distinguished line-up for this first of four volumes devoted to Vaughan Williams’s complete published arrangements of folk songs in English for voice with instrumental backing.

Of the 15 folk songs from Sussex collected by W Percy Merrick (1869-1955) that formed Book 5 in Novello’s series entitled ‘Folk Songs of England’ (under the editorship of Cecil Sharp), RVW supplied accompaniments for all but one. He also supervised the order in which they appear, thereby ensuring an appetising variety of mood, timbre and tonality if devoured in one sitting. The rewards are copious: baritone Roderick Williams is suitably rollicking in ‘Bold General Wolfe’ and ‘Captain Grant’; soprano Mary Bevan ravishes the ear and touches to the marrow in ‘Farewell, lads’; and tenor Nicky Spence displays a personable empathy with the cannily resourceful deeds of ‘Lovely Joan’ (a tune subsequently incorporated by the composer into his 1928 opera *Sir John in Love* and the central portion of *Fantasia on*

‘Greensleeves’). William Vann’s stylish and responsive support is a delight throughout. Listen out, too, for violinist Jack Liebeck’s exquisite contribution in ‘How cold the wind doth blow’ (alternatively known as ‘The Unquiet Grave’), Bevan’s haunting delivery of which was one of the most memorable components of an earlier Albion anthology entitled ‘Purer than Pearl’ (11/16); here it’s been (no less effectively) reimagined as a dialogue between her and Spence.

Similarly, the *Six English Folk Songs* of 1935 (already recorded on Albion ALBCD013 by bass-baritone Derek Welton partnered by Iain Burnside) are now shared between all three vocalists; Bevan and Spence in particular are sure to provoke a titter or two with their saucy rendition of ‘Rolling in the dew’. Intended by RVW to represent some of the finest specimens of English sea song, both ‘The Golden Vanity’ and ‘Just as the tide was flowing’ are taken from Vol 4 of *The Motherland Song Book* for unison and mixed voices published in 1919, the solo tenor part supplemented by a six-strong ‘harmonised chorus’ as per the composer’s instructions.

I’m happy to confirm that everything has been immaculately captured by



producer Andrew Walton and sound engineer Deborah Spanton. Nor can John Francis's copiously detailed annotation be faulted, making this an absolute must for all true Vaughan Williams aficionados. What are you waiting for?

Andrew Achenbach

## 'A Ceremony of Carols'

**Blackwell Lo**, how a rose e'er blooming **Britten**

A Ceremony of Carols **Dove** The Three Kings

**Hildegard of Bingen** O virga ac diadema

**McDowall** Now may we singen **M Praetorius**

Es ist ein Ros entsprungen. Geborn ist Gottes

Söhnelein. In dulci jubilo. Puer natus in

Bethlehem. Resonet in laudibus. Wie schön

leuchtet der Morgenstern **Tabakova** Good-will

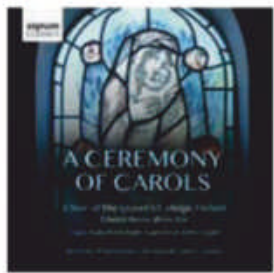
to men, and peace on Earth **Weir** Drop down,

ye heavens, from above **Young** The Owl

**Choir of The Queen's College, Oxford /**

**Owen Rees** with **Lucy Wakeford** *hp*

Signum © SIGCD627 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Companion pieces are everything. How you frame a work can change how we hear

it and how we listen – drawing out connections and correlations, setting a mood, creating a narrative. Where new rival recordings of *A Ceremony of Carols* (Clare Cambridge – Harmonia Mundi, 11/20; Crouch End Festival Chorus – Signum, page 82) opt for all-Britten programmes, Owen Rees and the Choir of The Queen's College have treated it as the centrepiece of a Christmas disc.

Taking Britten's collision of old and new as a starting point, Rees surrounds it with a sequence of traditional and contemporary carols and motets. Works by Michael Praetorius alternate with music by Jonathan Dove, Dobrinka Tabakova and Cecilia McDowall, among others.

Light, agile and bright, The Queen's Choir are a good advertisement for the traditional Oxbridge sound. Their upper voices – no countertenors here, incidentally – are fresh and agile, youthful enough to catch the innocence of Britten's cycle without it becoming too knowing, but also have the advantage of mature technique. Speeds can be swifter (both 'Deo gracias' and 'This little Babe' whip along), dramatic effects more pronounced ('This freezing winter night' unsettles as it chills) and the poise greater than any children's choir. The Nash Ensemble's Lucy Wakeford is a huge bonus as the harpist, her Interlude vividly atmospheric, melody dropped into the ear like the glistening drips from an icicle, each

glissando in 'Spring Carol' scattering glittering light and resonance.

The surrounding pieces are just as good. The light-footed ensemble are at their best in the polychoral Praetorius motets, phrases zinging to and fro in *In dulci jubilo* and *Puer natus in Bethlehem*, while also finding a tender simplicity for the chorale *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*.

But it's the newer works that are the real selling point. Rees's selection is clever, balancing the sweetness of his young singers with earthy, dance-driven carols that hark back to the form's medieval origins. I defy anyone who hears Toby Young's exhilarating *The Owl* not to be humming it a week later, with strong rivalry from both Cecilia McDowall's pulsing *Now may we singen* and Dobrinka Tabakova's irresistibly syncopated *Good-will to men, and peace on Earth*. Christmas has definitely arrived.

Alexandra Coghlan

## 'Christmas in Puebla'

**Cererols** Marizápalos a lo Divino 'Serafin que, con dulce armonía' **Fernandes** Tleycantimo choquiliya **García de Zéspedes** Convidando está la noche **López Capillas** Cui luna, sol et omnia **Padilla** A la xácara xacarilla. Christum natus est. Deus in adiutorium meum intende. Joseph fili David. Missa Joseph fili David. Tollite portas **Palestrina** Missa O admirabile commercium - Agnus Dei **Vidales** Alleluia: Crastina die. Los que fueren de buen gusto **Siglo de Oro / Patrick Allies**

Delphian © DCD34238 (68' • DDD • T/t)



'Christmas in Puebla' is to your traditional festive classical album as a spicy, aromatic

glass of mulled wine is to a tepid house red. Bursting with rhythm and colour, voices seasoned not just with mellow organ but bright harp and guitars, a belching dulcian, sackbut and, cutting clean through it all, tambourine, castanets and drums. Banish thoughts of cherub-faced choristers in musical soft-focus: this is high-energy, high-definition Christmas, prayer meets party.

This is Christmas from the New World and Spanish expat Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla is our guide. His Christmas Eve motet *Joseph fili David* and its associated double-choir Mass setting are the thread running through this programme. Heard here arranged for singers and chamber ensemble, it's a Mass in which thoughts of heaven are often interrupted by earthy celebration, always poised right on the

edge of dance. The tussle between the two worlds is captured in the uneven voice distribution of choirs where Choir I, dominated by upper voices, offers a transmuted, haloed answer to the more grounded Choir II.

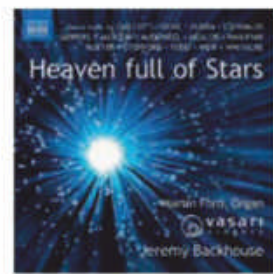
But lovely though the Mass is, it's the shorter *villancicos* that are the real star here. Music director Patrick Allies has chosen a wonderful selection from both Padilla's contemporaries in Mexico and the next generation. Grooving with syncopation, catchy homophonic choruses alternating with solo verses (both for voices and instruments), Juan García de Zéspedes's *Convidando está la noche* is the 17th century's answer to a Christmas No 1, matched for exhilaration by the swift, conversational exchanges and rhythmic sleight of hand of Francisco de Vidales's *Los que fueren de buen gusto* for three chattering female voices. Gentler, a lilting cradle song, Joan Cererols's *Serafin que, con dulce armonía* is also charming.

British vocal ensemble Siglo de Oro dispatch it all with style, more obviously at home in Padilla's formal polyphony than the exuberant anthems but gamely giving it their all. It does, however, still sometimes sound like what it is: an English choir putting on a Spanish accent. Just a little less beauty and a little more abandon would have made a New World of difference. That said, I'm still buying it for everyone I know this Christmas.

Alexandra Coghlan

## 'Heaven Full of Stars'

**Chilcott** Salisbury Motets<sup>a</sup> **Dove** Seek him that maketh the seven stars<sup>b</sup> **Dubra** O crux ave **Ešenvalds** O salutaris hostia. Stars **Gowers** Viri Galilaei<sup>b</sup> **G Jackson** Creator of the stars of night<sup>b</sup> **McDowall** Aurea luce<sup>b</sup> **Mealor** Ave maris stella **R Panufnik** Deus est caritas<sup>b</sup> **Rutter** For the beauty of the earth<sup>b</sup> **Stopford** Ave Maria<sup>b</sup> **Todd** Christ is the Morning Star<sup>b</sup> **Weir** Like to the falling of a star<sup>b</sup> **Whitacre** Lux aurumque **Vasari Singers / Jeremy Backhouse** with <sup>ab</sup>**Martin Ford** *org* <sup>a</sup>**Muriel Daniels** *vc* <sup>a</sup>**Sarah Mistry** *bell* Naxos © 8 574179 (82' • DDD • T/t)



Over 40 years the Vasari Singers and founder-conductor Jeremy Backhouse

have built up an impressive reputation and catalogue, with recordings spanning a wide range of repertoire but specialising in 20th- and 21st-century works. Now they mark their anniversary year with a collection of contemporary anthems – star-themed, as seems only appropriate.



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One of the UK's best amateur chamber choirs, the group has a light, youthful sound that lends itself well to pieces designed to glow, to radiate, to shimmer. The upper voices match the unearthly gleam of the water-filled wine glasses in Ēriks Ešēvalds's *Stars*, with the choir finding a brighter intensity for Jonathan Dove's *Seek him that maketh the seven stars* and a more muted, covered luminosity for Rihards Dubra's *O crux ave* and the supporting accompaniment to the two soaring soloists in Ešēvalds's *O salutaris hostia*.

There are some interesting lesser-known anthems here. Cecilia McDowall's *Aurea luce* is a slow-grower – an exercise in shifting waves of texture, pinpricks of flickering light in the organ pulsing underneath sustained chords, Judith Weir's *Like to the falling of a star* brings a welcome hit of rhythm to a programme dominated by meditative stillness, and 'Lovely tear from lovely eye' from Bob Chilcott's *Salisbury Motets* introduces a solo cello (beautifully played by Muriel Daniels) in a welcome extension and amplification of the set's richness.

There's variety here, but it's all in the detail. And there's only so much gilded affirmation you can enjoy without wanting a bit of palate-cleaning coolness, the tang of dissonance. You get hints of it in sections of the Dove and Gowers's *Viri Galilaei*, but not quite enough to get a fully rounded picture of a group that are so much more than just good soft-focus, generously sugared singers.

Alexandra Coghlan

## 'El Nour'

Abdel-Rahim Ana Bent El Sultan<sup>a</sup> **Berlioz** Zaïde, Op 19 No 1<sup>a</sup> **Bizet** Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe<sup>b</sup>

**Darwish** El Helwa Di<sup>c</sup> **Falla** Tus ojillos negros<sup>d</sup>

**Gaubert** Le repos en Égypte<sup>a</sup> **Hankash** Aatini Al Naya Wa Ghanni<sup>c</sup> **Hosni** Yamama Beida<sup>e</sup> **Lorca** Canciones españolas antiguas – Anda, jaleo; Sevillanas del siglo XVIII; Nana de Sevilla<sup>d</sup> **Ravel**

*Shéhérazade*<sup>b</sup> **Obradors** Del cabello más sutil<sup>d</sup>

**Rahbani** Sahar El Layali (Kan Enna Tahoun)<sup>c</sup>

**Serrano** La canción del olvido, 'Marinela, Marinela'<sup>d</sup>

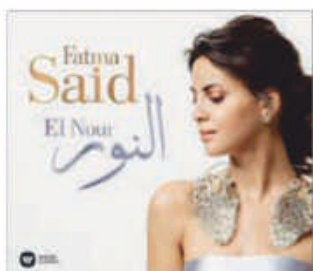
**Fatma Said** sop with <sup>ce</sup>**Tim Allhoff**, <sup>ab</sup>**Malcolm**

**Martineau** pf<sup>a</sup> **Rafael Aguirre** gtr<sup>ce</sup> **Henning**

**Sieverts** db<sup>ce</sup> **Tamer Pinarbaşı** qanun<sup>bce</sup> **Burcu**

**Karadağ** ney<sup>ce</sup> **Itamar Doari** perc<sup>e</sup> **Vision Quartet**

Warner Classics © 9029 52336-0 (65' • DDD • T/t)



'Wit, spice and plenty of polish' was Neil Fisher's five-star

assessment (*The Times*) of Fatma Said's 2018 Wigmore Hall recital. A lot of that spills over into this enjoyable debut album from the Egyptian soprano, which shares some of the material from that varied London programme. Under the title 'El Nour' – Arabic for 'light' – she presents a recital that crosses cultures and sheds light on art songs from France, Spain and Egypt and popular songs from the Middle East, exploring Mediterranean cultures meeting in very different styles.

In *Shéhérazade*, Ravel is more concerned with evoking the oriental atmosphere of Tristan Klingsor's perfumed poetry than depicting specific tales from the Arabian Nights. Said is an engaging storyteller, though, her French diction sharply animated, with shiny top notes glinting brilliantly. I miss the veiled silk of Marianne Crebassa's mezzo in her excellent account with Fazıl Say, and the way Said colours the word 'séduisante' in 'L'indifférent' isn't particularly seductive, but the nasal colouring to describe her master's 'long yellow nose in his white beard' in 'La flûte enchantée' is well characterised. Malcolm Martineau paints vivid pictures at the piano, too, and they are joined in the second song by Burcu Karadağ on the ney, its breathy tones adding a touch of authentic Middle Eastern spice. The ney crops up again in Bizet's 'Adieux de l'hôtesse arabe'.

Six Spanish songs are performed with guitar (Rafael Aguirre) and I wish there had been more. Falla's 'Tus ojillos negros' is darkly seductive, while Said melts in Obradors's 'Del cabello más sutil'. Three of Federico García Lorca's *Old Spanish Songs* burst with character. I've heard Berlioz's 'Zaïde' performed with guitar, too, but here Martineau is accompanist, along with crisp castanets which – having seen her perform 'Les filles de Cadix' at this year's Bastille Day concert – I assume are played by Said herself.

There are a couple of firsts on the album. Gamal Abdel-Rahim's 'I am the Sultan's Daughter' is a rare example of an Egyptian art song, while Philippe Gaubert's 'Le repos en Égypte' receives its first recording, a lullaby as the Holy Family rest on their flight into Egypt, beguilingly sung. The popular songs from Egypt and Lebanon that close this imaginative album feature traditional instruments such as the qanun and are a fascinating insight into Said's musical background. I'll be fascinated to see where Said goes next. **Mark Pullinger**

*Shéhérazade* – selected comparison:

*Crebassa, Say* (12/17) (ERAT) 9029 57689-7

## 'Sacred Treasures of Christmas'

Clemens non Papa Magi veniunt ab oriente

**G Gabrieli** O magnum mysterium **Guerrero**

Pastores loquebantur **Hassler** Verbum caro

factus est **Lassus** Omnes de Saba. Resonet in

laudibus **Mouton** Nesciens mater **Palestrina**

Surge, illuminare, Jerusalem **Nanino** Diffusa

est gratia **Sweelinck** Hodie Christus natus est

**Scheidt** Puer natus in Bethlehem **Sheppard**

Reges Tharsis et insulae **Tallis** Videte miraculum

**Victoria** Alma redemptoris mater a 5.

O magnum mysterium

The London Oratory Schola Cantorum /

Charles Cole

Hyperion © CDA68358 (76' • DDD • T/t)

## 'Sacred Treasures of Spain'

**Esquivel** Ego sum panis vivus **Guerrero** Ave

virgo sanctissima. O Domine Jesu Christe.

O sacrum convivium. Regina caeli a 8 **Lobo**

O quam suavis est, Domine. Versa est in luctum

**Morales** Peccantem me quotidie **Ribera** Dimitte

me ergo **Robledo** Salve regina **Victoria** Ave

Maria – a 4; a 8. O quam gloriosum **Vivanco**

Dulcissima Maria

The London Oratory Schola Cantorum /

Charles Cole

Hyperion © CDA68359 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Between them, England's cathedral choirs and Oxbridge choral foundations have an effective monopoly on polyphony with trebles on the top line. So it's lovely to hear from another institution. The London Oratory Schola Cantorum and their music director Charles Cole launch a new relationship with Hyperion with two releases: 'Sacred Treasures of Christmas' and 'Sacred Treasures of Spain'.

The series began back in 2017 on Sony with a collection of English works but now gains pace with this double release that continues the choir's geographic tour through the motet repertoire, while also diverging for a Christmas album drawing on music from right across Europe. This Christmas album (recorded two and a half years later) is the standout, the choral sound markedly more focused, the music delivered with greater confidence and variety.

The Schola may be the Brompton Oratory's parish choir but they are also a school ensemble whose back lines are made up of boys aged 18 and under, with the support of just six adult lay clerks. The effect is impressively mature and



GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Fatma Said*

The Egyptian soprano discusses her combination of Western and Arabic music on her debut album, 'El Nour'

**Can you tell us something of your musical upbringing in Cairo?**

I didn't have a professional musical upbringing. I had private piano lessons for a few years when I was young. I was always in choir and at the age of 13 my choir teacher organised an audition to sing for the soprano Neveen Allouba, a classical opera singer in Egypt. She agreed to work with me and train my classical voice. I had one lesson a week with her for four years until I graduated from school. She prepared me for my auditions in Berlin, where I later studied professionally with Renate Faltin.

**If it's possible to do so briefly, can you explain the main differences between Arabic music and the Western classical tradition?**

It is hard to answer this question in brief. The scales in Arabic music and Western music are very different. Studying Arabic music is really a world of its own and is completely different from the classical music path. In Arabic music we have our own rhythms, our own instruments, our own style and our own technique of using the voice. Many speak of quarter-tones when it comes to Arabic music. I always say: imagine a piano with each octave having 12 notes. Then imagine some extra notes in between those smallest intervals. These are the notes – or the 'ornaments' as they are usually spoken of in Arabic music – that are very difficult to notate clearly. It has a lot to do with instinct, feeling and tradition.

**The French and Spanish songs you've recorded are all highly coloured evocations, and in this sense the Egyptian music doesn't feel out of place. Is this tying together of similarities as important as highlighting stylistic differences?**

That's a way of seeing it, yes. On the album I'm trying more to shed light on the similarities and the elements that these three cultures have strongly in common. Of course there are stylistic differences – that has always been the case with music from different parts of the world. However, we barely speak about the closeness of this music and the similarities. The music selection made for this album basically connects each song in such a way that the main atmosphere of the album is never lost, despite jumping from one language or culture to the other.

**You have been researching Egyptian music at Oxford University – can you tell us something about this, and whether this work played a part in the album?**

I've been working on this project for the past six years and it is something close to my heart, since it involves music that is really important to me and that truly belongs to my Egyptian heritage. It is basically the study of 20th-century Egyptian orchestral music with a special focus on the orchestral songs



by the Egyptian composer Mohamed Abdel Wahab. I owe thanks to Dr James Whitbourn from Oxford University, who believed that we can turn this idea into a project and a serious collaboration with Oxford University. His curiosity and enthusiasm were a huge reason for me to start this collaboration, and I think it is important to record this music for future reference as there have been no recordings of these works since they were first recorded 60 or 70 years ago. It wouldn't have been possible to include these songs on my album 'El Nour' as they would have felt out of place, but I can't wait to be able to record them.

well blended, the bright, sweet top-line sound balanced to and shaped by the lighter lower voices. You can hear their flexibility in the contrast between Scheidt's *Puer natus in Bethlehem* and Sweelinck's double-choir *Hodie Christus natus est*, the disc's arresting opener – all fizz and crisp, forward delivery – and Mouton's *Nesciens mater*, its cloudy skeins of counterpoint drifting in the air like incense, the trebles softening the edges of their sound, allowing much more breath to flow through it.

This latter mode seems to be the favourite, the sound deployed elsewhere to great effect in Giovanni Gabrieli's *O magnum mysterium*, Nanino's too

little-heard *Diffusa est gratia* and the delicate, lace-like tracery of Victoria's *Alma redemptoris mater*. It becomes a bit of a default however in the Spanish album, where you long for just a little more contrast, a little more responsiveness to the variety and range of repertoire collected here.

While the Schola Cantorum are at home in the softer draping of Guerrero's counterpoint, revelling in the gentle sensuality of his *Ave virgo sanctissima* and his lyrical *O sacrum convivium*, they're less at home in the bolder, more architectural lines of Morales's penitential *Peccantem me quotidie* or the richer, more

declarative certainty of Victoria's *Ave Maria a 8*, where we lose both body in the tone and direction in the pacing – the triple-time dance of the 'ora pro nobis' all but imperceptible. Slower speeds may be necessary in the choir's home acoustic but simply aren't sustainable here in Holborn's St Alban's Church. Lobo's *Versa est in luctum* also lacks forward movement, resulting in a slight sagging of the top line.

The choir has obviously grown and developed since 2017, and if the Christmas collection is typical of things to come, this should be an interesting project to keep an eye on. **Alexandra Coghlan**



# WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month **Peter Quantrill**'s point of departure is ...

## *Bach's Christmas Oratorio (1734)*

**R**ecent winters have seen the *Christmas Oratorio* begin to leaven the seasonal diet of *Messiah* in British concert halls. There are sound reasons why it may never displace the home comforts of 'Comfort ye', not least the six-cantata, three-hour layout, even richer in one sitting than roast goose and plum pudding. Bach never conducted nor likely envisaged a 'complete' performance, yet he assembled and unified material of both secular and sacred origin by means of an Evangelist-led biblical narrative, an overarching tonal scheme and the probable help of his best Leipzig librettist, Picander.

When the oratorio is experienced *in toto*, trumpets and drums are conserved for points of maximum impact; the horns in the fourth cantata introduce a new and refreshingly bucolic colour. Even the points of prayerful repose – the sublime alto lullaby of the second cantata; a newly composed address of allemande-like grace to the believing heart in the third; a gentle assertion of divine power in the sixth – shift the perspective of listener and worshipper with all the composer's famed resources of ingenuity.

Beyond its technical demands, the very nature of the *Christmas Oratorio* challenges performers to add more than the sum of its considerable parts. In this regard, the supple direction of Rainer Johannes Homburg scores highly, as does the pin-bright new recording and the irreplaceable vigour of an all-male choir.

● Sols; Stuttgart Hymnus Boys' Ch; Handel's Company / Homburg (MDG)

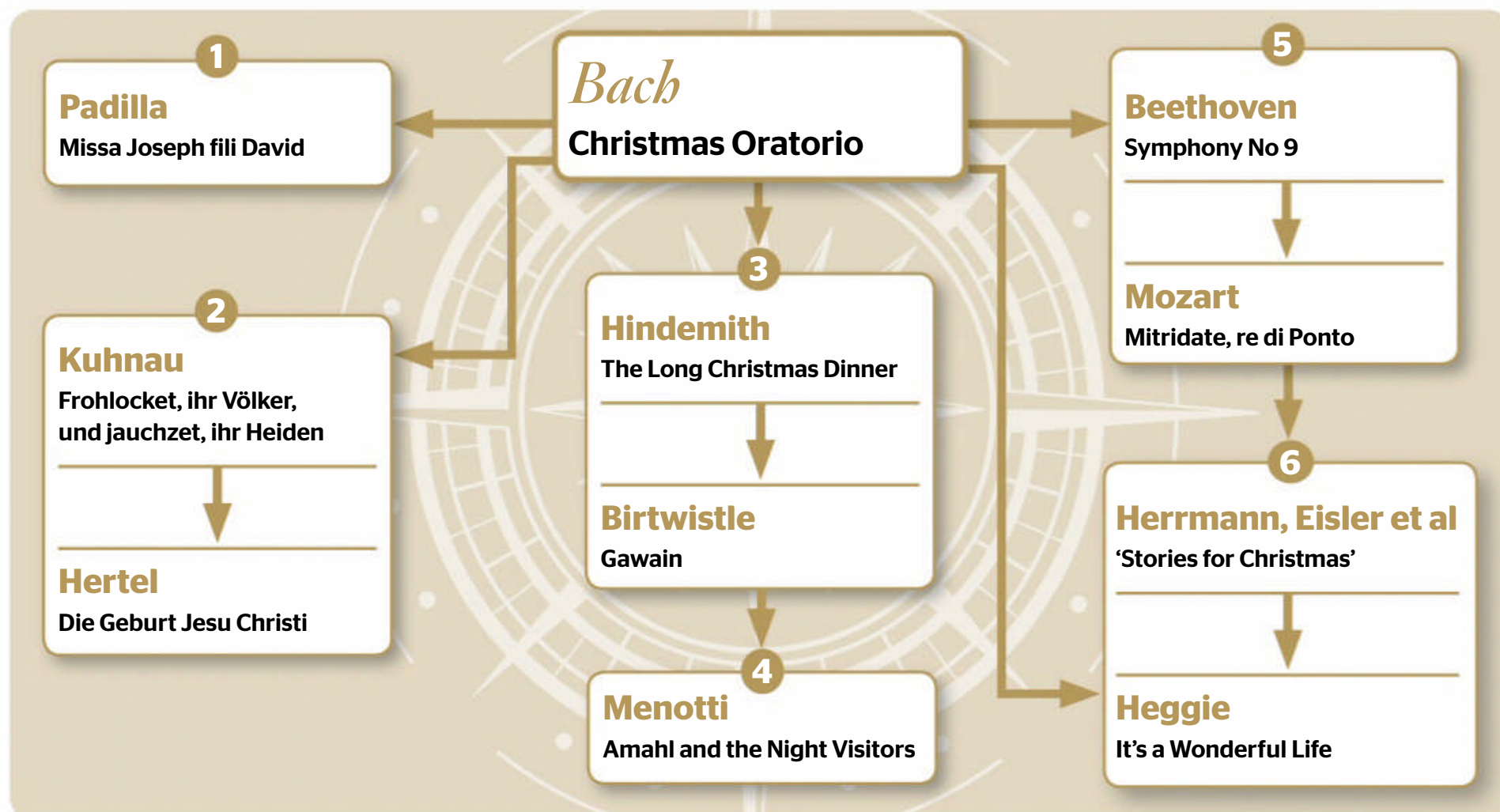
### 1 *Flying somewhere nice?*

**Padilla** *Missa Joseph fili David* (c1621) While holiday trips to Mexico are presently off limits, one of the UK's smartest early-music groups has issued a virtual ticket for the transatlantic voyage undertaken in 1620 by Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla when he threw up a steady career in Cadiz with dreams of making it big in the New World. In his Christmas Eve Mass and its vernacular companion pieces, cultures converge: suave Spanish polyphony with funky *villancico* style, sometimes cheek by jowl. The *Credo* sets out on best contrapuntal behaviour but within a line or two starts knocking back the tequila.

● Siglo de Oro / Allies (Delphian, 12/20)

### 2 *Off to church*

**Kuhnau** *Frohlocket, ihr Völker, und jauchzet, ihr Heiden* (c1721) 'Weihnachtsmusik an der Thomaskirche' is a new, imaginatively programmed and resplendently recorded opportunity to find out what Bach had to live up (or down) to as Kapellmeister of Leipzig's Thomaskirche, featuring Christmas music by his four immediate predecessors in the post. Tobias Michael sets *Machet die Tore weit* as a stately sacred concerto in Schützian style, but the highlight is Kuhnau's cantata, a striking forerunner of Bach's opening





'Jauchzet, frohlocket' chorus, paced out with a processional grandeur familiar from the ceremonial music of Handel.

● Sols; Kammerchor Bad Homburg; Johann Rosenmüller Ensemble / Rohn (Christophorus)

### Hertel *Die Geburt Jesu Christi* (1777)

Why this Christmas oratorio and not others in the rich German literature by Telemann, Mattheson and Stölzel? For one thing, Johann Wilhelm Hertel (1727-89) was born in Bach's home town of Eisenach, and he developed his own harmonically quirky voice. He emulates Bach rather than other predecessors in putting the narrative on pause for generously proportioned lyric reflections, venturing beyond generic vocal tinsel and piety – hear the lilting pre-Mozartian pathos of the soprano's aria which translates God's judgement flowing from heaven like a gentle (and most un-Lutheran) brook.

● Soloists; Kölner Akademie / Willens (CPO)



The Green Knight rides in – as in Birtwistle's opera *Gawain*

## 3 Carving up

**Hindemith *The Long Christmas Dinner*** (1961) Condensing 90 years of an American family's (mis)fortunes within less than an hour, Hindemith ensured that every joyful arrival, sad departure and touching aside in Thornton Wilder's libretto hits home with a Mozartian economy of scoring. The house and the Christmas turkey are the only constants in this one-act opera; around the table, children grow up, go off to work and war, become parents and face death. With them, we indulge in the season's habit of stocktaking nostalgia in a virtuoso piece of time-lapse photography in sound.

● Soloists; American Symphony Orchestra / Botstein (Bridge, 10/15)

**Birtwistle *Gawain*** (1991, rev 1994) Arthur's knights are enjoying their Christmas dinner when their king is jolted from his ennui by an uninvited visitor. The Green Knight rides in to Arthur's nervous brush-off in one of the zingers of David Harsent's underrated libretto ('it's nothing, nothing ... a Christmas mummer, a raree show'). But the young and rash Gawain accepts his challenge, and so begins an epic drama of magic, renewal and self-discovery, accompanied by an astonishing, restless, cimbalom-enriched score (revised again, in 2013, since Elgar Howarth's recording), glinting like a dagger. Gawain returns to Camelot exactly a year later, a little older and wiser, finding that little has changed – much like most families at Christmas.

● Soloists; Royal Opera House Chor and Orch / Howarth (NMC, 5/96)

## 4 Guests at the door

**Menotti *Amahl and the Night Visitors*** (1951) On their way to Bethlehem, the three kings from the sixth cantata of Bach's oratorio turn up one night at the cottage of a crippled shepherd-boy and his mother in Menotti's instant-hit chamber opera. Inspired by a Bosch canvas of the Nativity, the composer tapped into the story's earthiness and wonder for the new, everyday magic of the TV, engaged at the time on its rapid conquest of homes across America. *Amahl* launched the ever promising, ever troubled genre of TV opera, but the delicacy of its scoring and sentiment endures on stage and on record; this beautifully prepared version is a happy transfer from one medium to the other.

● Soloists; Nashville Symphony Orchestra / Willis et al (Naxos, 3/09)

## 5 Going out

**Beethoven *Symphony No 9*** (1824)

Holing up at home or with friends is a Christmas Day custom peculiar to English-speaking lands. I once saw *Die Frau ohne Schatten* in Vienna on December 25. In Tokyo or Osaka, only one work is ever on the bill: *Daiku* ('big nine'), rapidly assimilated within Japanese culture since 1940 as a social ritual like the tea ceremony (and a festive meal of KFC). The availability of native recordings is frustratingly patchy beyond their shores; even in Japan, Koho Uno (1930-2016) is a controversial figure, a music journalist who took up the baton to advance the cause of a highly interventionist, post-Furtwängler style of interpretation in the Viennese classics.

● Soloists; Kobe City Philharmonic Chorus; Osaka SO / Uno (Exton/Octavia)

**Mozart *Mitridate, re di Ponto*** (1770)

Throughout the 18th century, opera houses across Europe went dark for the penitential season of Advent and reopened with a flourish on December 26. At the ducal theatre in Milan in 1770, the show was composed and conducted by the teenage Mozart. Tailored to fit a cast of vocal virtuosos, *Mitridate* went down so well that the Milanese commissioned another Roman-themed *opera seria* two years later, but the performers and standing-room-only audience for *Lucio Silla* were kept waiting for three hours while the archduke finished writing his Christmas cards.

● Soloists; The Mozartists / Page (Signum, 11/14)

## 6 Staying in

**Herrmann, Eisler et al *'Stories for Christmas'*** (1940s) Remember the pre-TV era when families gathered round the wireless on Christmas Eve, and the pall of post-war austerity was lifted by a story of winter chill and redemptive warmth and the glamour of a Hollywood narrator? No, me neither, but a new album rolls back the years with six of those made-for-radio plays in sparky new transfers of the original Decca tapes. Film composers of serious pedigree composed and conducted the scores. Have a hanky ready for the mahogany tones of Gregory Peck unfurling the miracle of a little mute boy who finds his voice. Charles Laughton and Hanns Eisler make the most unlikely and winning of combinations in telling Dickens's tale of *Mr Pickwick's Christmas*.

● Bing Crosby, Loretta Young, Orson Welles *narrs* et al (Decca Eloquence)

**Heggie *It's a Wonderful Life*** (2016) Frank Capra's 1946 film tapped into the same post-war hunger for hope as the Christmas Eve radio plays and *Amahl*. Working in the lyric tradition of Menotti and Barber rather than the minimalists, with more than a nod to Broadway, Jake Heggie made it into an opera waiting to be written. His punchy, chamber-sized accompaniment underscores Gene Scheer's repartee-filled libretto and daringly falls silent for the narrative climax. The transitioning of guardian-angel Clarence into Clara is a happy stroke of genius in (literally) lifting the tone of tragedy; so is casting Patti LuPone as the voice of God.

● Soloists; Houston Grand Opera / Summers (Pentatone, 11/17)

Available to stream at Apple Music



# Opera



## Andrew Mellor hears an opera on the life of da Ponte by Tarik O'Regan:

*'O'Regan's pastiche has immense style and his word-setting is excellent: even in ensembles, words are decipherable'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**



## Mark Pullinger on Marek Janowski's low-key *Il tabarro* from Dresden:

*'Melody Moore sings a rich-voiced Giorgetta, successfully avoiding any hint of squalliness at the top'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 96**

## Boismortier

### Les voyages de l'Amour

**Chantal Santon Jeffery** *sop* ..... L'Amour  
**Katherine Watson** *sop* ..... Zéphire  
**Judith van Wanroij** *sop* ..... Daphné  
**Katia Velletaz** *sop* **Éléonore Pancrazi** *mez*  
**Thomas Dolié** *bar* **Purcell Choir**;  
**Orfeo Orchestra / György Vashegyi**  
 Glossa Ⓢ ② GCD924009 (159' • DDD)  
 Includes libretto and translation



Sometimes dubbed 'the French Telemann', Joseph Bodin de

Boismortier was both admired and mocked for what a contemporary versifier ambiguously called his fertile plume. The grace and easy, Italian-influenced melodiousness of his music ensured his abiding popularity – and wealth – in Louis XV's Paris. Staged at the Opéra in 1736, the ballet *Les voyages de l'Amour* – given here with two alternative versions of Act 2 – was a perfect vehicle for Boismortier's talents. In the slender plot, the disguised Cupid leaves his love-island of Cythera to move between country, town and court in search of a constant lover. Predictably, pastoral innocence, in the form of the faithful shepherdess Daphné, prevails over the shallow cynicism of court and city. Touched by her sincerity, Cupid reveals his true self, and all celebrate their union with singing and dancing.

You could never accuse Boismortier of long-windedness. A total of 130 tracks on these two discs says it all. You'll look in vain in this premiere recording for the breadth and range of Rameau's near-contemporary *Les Indes galantes*. But among the series of tiny vignettes – airs, duets, dances and choruses – there is plenty to beguile. Using a wide palette of instrumental colours, including a hurdy-gurdy, Boismortier has a delicate sense of the picturesque, with flutes and bassoons especially favoured. Wistful minuets, chic gavottes and jaunty tambourins and

rigaudons thread their way agreeably through the score. Most memorable of the airs is the exquisitely languid *sommeil* for Daphné in the final act, sung with drowsy sensuality by Judith van Wanroij, who later reveals a touch of steel in her limpid tone as she denounces her apparently faithless lover (Cupid in disguise).

The rest of the soprano-dominated cast, all well-versed in the French Baroque, are equally good, both in song and lively declamation. All make much of the text. As a guileful, ultimately sympathetic Cupid, Chantal Santon Jeffery could hardly be bettered, whether in her smiling solos in the Prologue or the mock-pathos of her wooing of Daphné. Katherine Watson copes well with the high tessitura of the solos for Cupid's sidekick Zéphire, blithely dispatching the Italianate coloratura aria with recorders 'Les ris, le jeux'. The sweet-toned Katia Velletaz is delightful as the upwardly mobile Lucile, egged on by her worldly nurse (saltily played by Éléonore Pancrazi) to dump her lover in favour of the son of Venus. Although he can reach over-optimistically for low notes, the one male cast member, Thomas Dolié, sings with sturdy relish in roles that include a preening court Lothario and a soothsayer. He and Pancrazi are specially impressive where Boismortier is at his most dramatically vivid, in the darkly coloured oracle scene in which the soothsayer calls up the *génies élémentaires*.

That avid explorer of French operatic rarities, György Vashegyi, directs his Hungarian forces with his usual zest (the pacing of the dialogues seems spot on) and feeling for colour. The many instrumental solos, not least the gurgling bassoons, are first-rate, while the Purcell Choir are spirited in attack and always alive to the words. There is an excellent introduction by Boismortier scholar Benoît Dratwicky, plus full text and translation. If you fancy a varied dose of Gallic mellifluousness, performed with charm and style, pleasure is guaranteed. **Richard Wigmore**

## Enna

### Kleopatra

**Elsebeth Dreisig** *sop* ..... Kleopatra  
**Magnus Vigilius** *ten* ..... Harmaki  
**Lars Møller** *bar* ..... Sepa  
**Ruslana Koval** *sop* ..... Charmion  
**Jens Bové** *bass* ..... Schafra  
**Kirsten Grønfeldt** *sop* ..... Iras  
**Danish National Opera Chorus; Odense Symphony Orchestra / Joachim Gustafsson**  
 Dacapo Ⓢ ② 8 226708/9 (112' • DDD)  
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



August Enna (1859-1939) was raised on a Danish island by a shoemaker, a striking

parallel with Hans Christian Andersen were Enna's father not a Sicilian immigrant. He would enjoy a period as one of Denmark's most successful opera composers, of which *Kleopatra* represents the peak. Following its premiere in Copenhagen in 1894, it was seen all over Europe.

Enna's guiding lights were Wagner and Delibes but he was well aware of Leoncavallo and Puccini. *Kleopatra* is not as fluent, dramatically bold or musically groundbreaking as *Turandot*, to which it has been compared. But it churns through its Wagnerian arioso style with theatrical richness, boasts an attractive 'big tune' that could have come from Korngold and is imaginatively orchestrated. Enna does a nice line in operatic rapture and clearly learnt a thing or two about the scenic 'full-stop' from early Wagner, though the comparison shows his limitations: he musters all his forces surely at the end of Act 1 but can't really work out where to take them at the point of climax. Conversely, the movement and momentum that launch Act 2 – excitable, chugging winds à la *Tannhäuser* – is but one example of his successfully quickening the pulse.

Unfortunately, Einar Christiansen's libretto is verbose, archaic and needlessly inflates the first act (he did a far better job for *Saul og David* by Carl Nielsen, who





Laser-like focus: Elsebeth Dreisig stars as August Enna's Kleopatra in the first recording of a landmark in Danish operatic history

would have played the violin in *Kleopatra*'s first performances). The story is plain enough: the prince Harmaki is sent to kill Cleopatra but falls in love with her; his jealous accomplice Charmion reveals the plot to ensure Harmaki is caught, and weeps over her deed in a moving epilogue.

In March 2019 Denmark's national touring opera company Den Jyske Opera (the Danish National Opera) revived the piece for the first time in well over a century as part of its Danish Series strand, which promises even more recordings for Dacapo. I saw Ben Bauer's sleek production when it arrived at the Royal Danish Theatre's Old Stage that month but when the company gathered in Odense to record the score in April, it was with the different, mostly Danish cast that sang the night after.

In the theatre in 2019 – as, apparently, in 1894 – the problem was balance: voices struggling for purchase while Enna indulges his orchestra. That's fixed to some degree here though by no means completely. As Harmaki, Magnus Vigilius is sometimes overwhelmed in his Act 2 monologue and disappears from the sound picture at the climax of the love scene, while his Kleopatra, Elsebeth Dreisig (Elsa's

aunt) pings out. Vigilius can occasionally sound throaty but has presence and draws his character well in spite of the text.

Dreisig's laser-like focus can deliver pin-sharp top notes (though doesn't always) and she offers some beautiful, sensitive singing, especially in her first appearance, with harp for company (a coup on Enna's part). She is certainly more convincing in seductive than in commanding mode. Lars Møller's Sepa is a little groany and, as Charmion, Ruslana Koval doesn't quite match my memories of Tanja Kuhn's captivating portrayal in the opera house, but shows some potential with heartfelt singing whose openness is only slightly curtailed by her obviously learnt Danish. *Kleopatra* may not have quite the impact it enjoyed in the theatre but its first recording must be welcomed with open arms.

Andrew Mellor

## Hahn

### L'île du rêve

**Hélène Guilmette** *sop* ..... Mahénu  
**Cyrille Dubois** *ten* ..... Georges de Kerven, dit Loti  
**Anaïk Morel** *mez* ..... Oréna  
**Artavazd Sargsyan** *ten* ..... Tsen-Lee/First Officer  
**Ludivine Gombert** *sop* ..... Téria/Faïmana  
**Thomas Dolié** *bar* ..... Taïrapa/Henri/Second Officer

**Chorus of Le Concert Spirituel; Munich Radio Orchestra / Hervé Niquet**

Bru Zane © BZ1042 (61' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Hahn's 'Polynesian idyll' was first performed at the Opéra-Comique in a double bill with Delibes's *Le roi l'a dit* in March 1898. His first opera,

we owe it to his teacher Massenet, who admitted to perplexity that his talented Venezuelan pupil (Hahn did not become a French citizen until 1909) was prevented, through lack of a French passport, from entering the the Prix de Rome competitions. So in 1891, when Hahn was 17, Massenet insisted that, as 'holiday homework', he set Georges Hartmann and André Alexandre's libretto based on the novel *Le mariage de Loti* by the writer and would-be adventurer Julien Viaud, better known by the pseudonym Pierre Loti. Hahn, it would seem, took his time with it, not completing the score until 1894. Massenet, undeterred when the Opéra-Comique's Léon Carvalho rejected it



outright, had the work printed by his own publisher in 1897: it was only the following year, when Albert Carré took over the Comique's management, that the premiere finally went ahead.

Loti's narratives of East-West dialogue and conflict popularised the orientalist strain in late 19th-century culture, and the plot, about a French naval officer's affair with a 16-year-old Tahitian girl, has similarities to *Lakmé*, *Madama Butterfly* and also, as the booklet notes point out, *Miss Saigon*. It sits at a tangent from its fellows, however, by being a work of understated emotion and quiet sadness rather than a tragedy, as Loti (now named Georges de Karven) and Mahénu separate knowing that their relationship would not survive Loti's return to his old life in France. A biblical subtext – Mahénu's adoptive father Tairapa reads the story of Adam and Eve – identifies the island as a new earthly Paradise that contains within it the seeds of its own fall. Loti has a rival for Mahénu, meanwhile, in Tsen-Lee, a manipulative, affluent Chinaman – a suspect figure, uncomfortably teetering on stereotype.

The score has passages of great beauty but is uneven. Hahn's evocation of Tahiti, all harp arpeggios, shimmering strings and parallel woodwind turns, can be ravishing. The work is largely through-composed: the closest we get to a set-piece aria is Loti's Act 3 outburst when he realises he must tell Mahénu about his impending departure. Tairapa's Bible reading is prefaced by a beautiful, almost Baroque string introduction, very much a high point. Apart from the big Polynesian hymn that opens Act 3, meanwhile, Hahn largely avoids local colour: Tsen-Lee is given a mercurial woodwind scherzo, rather than overt chinoiserie, which tries to avoid caricature, though his scenes simply go on too long, I'm afraid.

It's for the most part beautifully done, too. Cyrille Dubois is a wonderfully ardent Loti, singing with passionate restraint and easy liquidity of tone. Hélène Guilmette's Mahénu is fractionally cooler: her singing in Act 3 is not as intense as one might ideally wish, though the sound is lovely, with exquisite floated *pianissimos* and beguiling melismas. The rest of the cast, some of them taking multiple roles, are consistently strong, and the Munich Radio Orchestra sound sumptuous for Hervé Niquet, who presses through the work with quiet urgency; this is a score that would cloy if taken too slowly. There's fine choral singing, too, from his Concert Spirituel choir, though the recording, otherwise scrupulously balanced, for some

reason makes no attempt to distance the chorus when they're meant to be offstage.

Tim Ashley

## Messenger



**Fortunio**

**Cyrille Dubois** *ten* ..... Fortunio  
**Anne-Catherine Gillet** *sop* ..... Jacqueline  
**Jean-Sébastien Bou** *bar* ..... Clavaroche  
**Philippe-Nicolas Martin** *bar* ..... Landry  
**Franck Leguérinel** *bar* ..... Maître André  
**Luc Bertin-Hugault** *bass* ..... Maître Subtil  
**Geoffroy Buffière** *bass* ..... Guillaume  
**Pierre Derhet** *ten* ..... D'Azincourt  
**Thomas Dear** *bass* ..... De Verbois  
**Aliénor Feix** *me* ..... Madelon  
**Sarah Jouffroy** *contr* ..... Gertrude

**Les Éléments Choir; Orchestre des Champs-Élysées / Louis Langrée**

Stage director **Denis Podalydès**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Naxos ® DVD 2 110672; ® NBD0119V

(119' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Opéra Comique, Paris, December 14 & 16, 2019

Includes synopsis



André Messager's a bit of a rarity in the opera house these days. The work you're most likely to encounter in the UK

is his music for the ballet *The Two Pigeons* (revived, in recent years, by The Royal Ballet), but most of his stage works were operettas or *opéras comiques*. The aria 'Le jour sous le soleil béni' from *Madame Chrysanthème* crops up on the occasional recital disc but it's his *comédie lyrique* *Fortunio* that has captured Parisian hearts. Denis Podalydès's 2009 production at the Opéra-Comique made a welcome return last December, which I saw from one of the cramped wooden seats high up in the gods.

The Comique excavates its fair share of French froth – Offenbach is a house speciality – but *Fortunio* isn't in that mould. It's a touching little romcom, based on Alfred de Musset's play *Le chandelier*, about a shy young clerk to the lawyer Maître André, who is used as a decoy for an affair between André's wife, Jacqueline, and the officer Clavaroche ... the only problem being that Fortunio falls for Jacqueline himself. The cuckolded lawyer is a comic character, but young Fortunio is a sincere soul whose purity wins Jacqueline's affections, ousting her soldier lover.

The work premiered at the Comique in 1907, with the likes of Claude Debussy,

Reynaldo Hahn and Gabriel Fauré among the audience. Fauré, who as Messager's former composition teacher may have been a little biased, reviewed it for *Le Figaro*, praising the composer's 'gifts of elegance and clarity, of wit, of playful grace, united to the most perfect knowledge of the technique of his art, the rarest qualities of emotion and delicacy'. Musically, it is indeed full of interest – imagine Massenet's *Werther* tinged with Wagner. Fortunio and Jacqueline share a particularly heady duet in Act 4.

Podalydès follows the libretto faithfully, while transferring the action to the period of composition. From the snow-strewn courtyard at the beginning, Éric Ruf's sets are simple and attractive, as are the elegant costumes by Christian Lacroix.

Cyrille Dubois is wonderful in the title-role. His tenor, with its slight flutter and exquisite head notes, makes for an appealing performance as the lovelorn youngster. He is well matched by Anne-Catherine Gillet's attractive Jacqueline, smoothly sung, well acted. Franck Leguérinel has fun as her crusty old husband, while Jean-Sébastien Bou offers plenty of swagger as her secret lover, his high baritone in fine fettle (I enjoyed him in *Mârrouf, savetier du Caire* at the Comique a year earlier). In the pit, Louis Langrée coaxes lovely, affectionate playing from the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées, shaping Messager's melodies with great care.

For gentle, escapist charm – and many of us require large doses of that right now – *Fortunio* would seem to be the perfect remedy. **Mark Pullinger**

## Monteverdi

**Orfeo**

**Emiliano Gonzalez Toro** *ten* ..... Orfeo  
**Emőke Baráth** *sop* ..... La Musica/Euridice  
**Fulvio Bettini** *bar* ..... Apollo/Spirto infernale/Eco  
**Mathilde Etienne** *sop* ..... Proserpina  
**Alix Le Saux** *mez* ..... Speranza/Pastore  
**Natalie Pérez** *mez* ..... Messenger  
**Nicolas Brooymans** *bass* ..... Plutone/Pastore  
**Jérôme Varnier** *bass* ..... Caronte/Spirto infernale  
**Zachary Wilder** *ten* ..... Pastore/Spirto infernale  
**Juan Sancho** *ten* ..... Pastore/Spirto infernale  
**Alicia Amo** *sop* ..... Ninfa  
**Ensemble Vocal de Poche; I Gemelli /**

**Emiliano Gonzalez Toro**

Naïve ® ② V7176 (97' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



It is both in keeping with a sense of attention to historical detail, as well as





Gentle, escapist charm: Jean-Sébastien Bou and Anne-Catherine Gillet impress – alongside Cyrille Dubois in the title-role – in a revival of André Messager's *Fortunio*

something of a personal testament, that Emiliano Gonzalez Toro heads his booklet note to this new recording 'In the beginning was the word', a clear reference to Monteverdi's famous aesthetic statement. Both in his own singing and in that of the other soloists, there is a keen collective sympathetic understanding of Monteverdi's operatic language, a language generated by the ideal of a complete fusion of words and music. That sense of commitment is evident from the very start, with Emőke Baráth's sensitively delivered account of the Prologue, and in many other moments including Orfeo's opening arioso 'Rosa del ciel' to the beautifully paced emotional unfolding of the messengers' announcement. Gonzalez has a fine voice and gives 'Possente spirto', the geographical and spiritual heart of the work, a reading of great poetic beauty, the neatly articulated virtuoso passagework controlled and with just occasional signs of strain. In keeping with what is known about the first performance, the choruses are sung with just one voice to a part. They are done so with warmth and rhythmic vivacity but the determination to project forward motion in the first two acts leads to some implausible speeds for some of the choruses, 'Lasciate i monte' being a notable instance.

It is particularly in relation to instrumentation that Monteverdi's score is difficult to realise. Faced with the long list of instruments printed at the front of the score, and some imprecise indications inside it, the temptation is to stretch the evidence; but Gonzalez intelligently avoids the worst excesses of over-instrumentation while still respecting the implicit division between the dark timbres of the underworld and the airy and bright textures of pastoral Arcadia. Improvised ornamentation of the instrumental lines is another matter. From the moment that *La Musica* is introduced with a cascade of improvised passagework on the triple harp, it is clear that added arpeggios, scale passages and melodic fragments are to be the order of the day, in addition to the standard decorative flourishes validated by the contemporary literature. The result, a cornucopia of unscripted activity, will not please everyone despite its undoubted virtuosity, and contrasts somewhat with the embellishments added by the soloists, usually in a more unobtrusive way.

This is a dramatic and lively reading given by a well-selected and carefully matched cast guided by a musician of sensitivity and imagination. The

competition is of course fierce with, among others, Jürgen Jürgens, John Eliot Gardiner and Gabriel Garrido in contention. My own preference remains with the 1984 EMI recording co-directed by Charles Medlam and Nigel Rogers, whose expertly paced and magisterial rendition of 'Possente spirto', sensuous, passionate and thoroughly convincing through its projection of sheer vocal authority, remains unrivalled. **Iain Fenlon**

*Selected comparisons:*

Jürgens, r1973 (11/74<sup>R</sup>) (ARCH) ➤ 447 703-2AX2

Medlam, Rogers (5/85<sup>R</sup>) (ERAT) ➤ 482070-2

Gardiner (12/87) (ARCH) 419 250-2AH2 or  
478 3425DMO2

Garrido (10/98<sup>R</sup>) (ACCE) ACC24328

## O'Regan



### The Phoenix

**Thomas Hampson** *bar* ..... Lorenzo da Ponte

**Luca Pisaroni** *bass-bar* ..... Enzo

**Chad Shelton** *ten* ..... Patrick Kelly

**Rihab Chaieb** *mez* ..... Maria Malibran

**Lauren Snouffer** *sop* ..... Giulietta

**Elizabeth Sutphen** *sop* ..... Faustina

**Houston Grand Opera Chorus and Orchestra /**

**Patrick Summers** *fp*

Pentatone ® ➤ PTC5186 857 (144' • DDD)

Recorded live

Includes synopsis





Opera about opera is a dangerous business when the art form needs to emphasise its relevance and broaden its reach, but it may be that Tarik O'Regan and librettist John Caird pitched their example for Houston just right. There are plenty of titters in the audience when cognoscenti phrases crop up ('nobody cares about the baritone, darling') and when the music runs for the safety of recitatives and ensembles à la Mozart and da Ponte.

It evidently made for a fun evening inside the Alice and George Brown Theater (ticking plenty of 'grand opera' boxes as it went), but O'Regan's work on the semi-fictionalised life of Lorenzo da Ponte is bland and exhausting on record, especially with no libretto provided for this digital release (large chunks of the work are in Italian). Though styled as an opera-within-an-opera ('The Phoenix' is an autobiographical opera written by da Ponte and his son Enzo – though actually written by O'Regan – and played in Act 2 of *The Phoenix*), the work is mostly fast-paced narrative and characterisation is thin. It is hard to have much sympathy with the unrealistic, impatient, irresponsible, comically self-important and culturally imperialistic da Ponte but we are asked to very early on (the beautifully written 'I dreamed of the life of a mind'). By the end of Act 2 you've not so much lost interest in his project to build an Italian opera house on Manhattan as started to wish him a swift departure from this life.

O'Regan's music is a skilful assembly of off-the-shelf tools, techniques and tricks – entirely tonal but without a single memorable tune. His pastiche has immense style and his word-setting is excellent: even in ensembles, words are decipherable (not so much the choruses). But it's also stop-start, over-uses simple devices and – with the exception of a toe-curling final chorus reminiscent of *Mr Holland's Opus* – never really rises or falls. These are the sorts of things that good stagecraft may well have overridden in Houston, and O'Regan never gets in the way of what little drama there is. But they make the decision to release the opera audio-only seem baffling. To add further mystery, the digital booklet is clearly aimed at those seeing the opera live.

Thomas Hampson brings presence to the title character, his voice still ballasted and charismatic even if it betrays its age and experience. Given the lack of a libretto

it's not always easy to decipher who is singing what elsewhere, but the principals seem uniformly fresh and animated, a testament to the pre-Covid health of the company (no dates are given for the live recording), whose MD Patrick Summers has tight hold of the reins in the pit.

Andrew Mellor

## Puccini

### *Il tabarro*

**Lester Lynch** *bar* ..... Michele  
**Melody Moore** *sop* ..... Giorgetta  
**Brian Jagde** *ten* ..... Luigi  
**Simeon Esper** *ten* ..... Tinca  
**Martin-Jan Nijhof** *bass* ..... Talpa  
**Roxana Constantinescu** *mez* ..... Frugola  
**Khanyiso Gwexane** *ten* ..... Ballard Seller  
**MDR Leipzig Radio Choir; Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra / Marek Janowski**  
 Pentatone ⑤ PTC5186 773 (50' • DDD/DSD)  
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



When reviewing Marek Janowski's Dresden Philharmonic *Cavalleria rusticana*

(8/20), Hugo Shirley noted that the conductor 'hardly gets down and dirty with this prototypical *verismo* score'. That Pentatone recording came from a concert performance in Dresden's Kulturpalast in March 2019. The other half of the double bill that evening was *Il tabarro* – with the same principals – which now appears on this new release.

Janowski doesn't get 'down and dirty' in Puccini's sweaty one-acter either. There's plenty of detail in the prelude's Parisian soundscape but the temperature rarely rises above tepid in the 48 minutes that follow. The seething climax of the Giorgetta-Luigi duet, where passions should reach boiling point, goes for little here and Michele's furious 'Sgualdrina!' when Giorgetta escapes his attempts at a kiss sounds far too tame. When it comes to the climax, where Michele strangles Luigi to death, one pictures the two singers at their music stands, politely going through the motions. Full marks, though, to Pentatone for good booklet notes, a full libretto and English and German translations.

The American principals harness plenty of decibels. Brian Jagde has developed into quite a stentorian tenor, here as the rough-handed stevedore Luigi, and has the most Italianate tone of the three. Melody Moore sings a rich-voiced Giorgetta, successfully avoiding any hint of squalliness at the top. Lester Lynch is a crusty, effortful Michele, the barge owner who discovers his younger

wife's affair, hurling his bruising baritone into the climax of his monologue 'Nulla, silenzio'. Among the minor roles, Roxana Constantinescu is good as the chatterbox La Frugola, but this is a performance that needs smearing with a little more greasepaint. **Mark Pullinger**

## Rameau

### *Les Boréades*

**Deborah Cachet** *sop* ..... Alphise  
**Mathias Vidal** *ten* ..... Abaris  
**Benedikt Kristjánsson** *ten* ..... Calisis  
**Nicolas Brooymans** *bass* ..... Borée  
**Tomáš Šelc** *bass-bar* ..... Borilée  
**Benoît Arnould** *bar* ..... Adamas  
**Lukáš Zeman** *bar* ..... Apollo  
**Caroline Weynants** *sop* ..... Sémire/Amour/Polimnie  
**Collegium 1704 / Václav Luks**  
 Château de Versailles Spectacles ⑥ ③ CVS026  
 (165' • DDD)  
 Recorded live, January 24, 2020  
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Much uncertainty surrounds the origins of Rameau's last

opera. It used to be thought that it was withdrawn when the composer died while it was being rehearsed at the Paris Opéra. It's now known that *Les Boréades* was in rehearsal during 1763, the previous year, for performance at court; but for some reason it was never performed. Then there is the question of the libretto, anonymous but attributed to Louis de Cahusac, with whom Rameau had collaborated many times. But Cahusac died in 1759, which suggests either that the attribution is incorrect or that the music dates from several years before the opera went into production.

What is certain is that the first staged performances took place at the Aix-en-Provence Festival in 1982, conducted by John Eliot Gardiner. In 2003 William Christie conducted a production by Robert Carsen at the Palais Garnier in Paris. Both were recorded, the latter on DVD. This new version comes from sessions around the time of a concert performance in the Opéra Royal at Versailles last January.

Cahusac was the librettist of *Zoroastre* (1749), an opera with references to Freemasonry. *Les Boréades* has also been seen as a Masonic piece: the connection is not an obvious one, though Apollo does descend as a *deus ex machina* to bring the victory of light over darkness. Alphise, the queen of Bactria, is required to marry a





Easy melodiousness: the conductor György Vashegyi leads the Purcell Choir and Orfeo Orchestra in Boismortier's *Les voyages de l'amour* – see review on page 92

Boread – a descendant of Borée, the god of the North Wind. Calisis and Borilée both qualify, without seeming to mind much which of them is chosen. But Alphise loves an outsider, Abaris. When she renounces the throne in order to marry him the outraged Borée whips up a storm: Alphise is abducted and threatened with torture. It is only when Apollo announces that Abaris is his son by a nymph who is herself a Boread that the situation is resolved: Alphise and Abaris are free to marry.

The happy ending is signalled almost from the outset, as there's a heavy hint from Adamas, the High Priest of Apollo, to whom Abaris had been entrusted as a child. Not only that: Cupid descends and presents Alphise with – not a magic flute but a magic arrow, while endorsing her choice of husband. But the lack of tension is more than balanced by the quality of the music, the aged Rameau here in mid-season form. The orchestra includes clarinets and horns, the latter's hunting calls continuing from the Overture into the first scene. There's a vigour and charm to the choruses and dances that is quite irresistible. A wonderfully vivid storm connects the third and fourth acts. Does the chorus in Act 4, 'Terrible Dieu des

vents', really end on a dominant seventh? Yes, it does; it's followed by a heartfelt air for Abaris, 'Lieux désolés', permeated by a weeping two-note figure for the flutes and violins. And Act 5 is introduced by an astonishing sound picture of disconnected phrases.

All this is superbly performed by Václav Luks and his Czech chorus and orchestra. The principal soloists are, mostly, French or Belgian. As the much put-upon Alphise, Deborah Cachet is particularly forceful in 'Songe affreux', where she dismisses the nightmare that she had described earlier. The metaphor air for Alphise or Sémire, 'Un horizon serein', is assigned to Sémire, Alphise's confidante: less appropriate, but Caroline Weynants spits out the extraordinary repeated quavers – another storm! – with brilliance; indeed it's hard to distinguish her soprano from that of the similarly bright-edged Deborah Cachet.

Mathias Vidal's Abaris is comparable with Philip Langridge's five-star performance for John Eliot Gardiner. After the exquisite *mezza voce* of 'Charmes trop dangereux' comes an ardent declaration of love to Alphise, followed in turn by his spirited leading of a chorus in praise of Apollo. There's fine support from the Boread suitors and from

Benoît Arnoult as Adamas; Nicolas Brooymans makes a sonorous Borée, the god of the North Wind and cause of the trouble.

This is a first-rate performance, on a par with Gardiner's terrific recording on Erato. That set doesn't include a libretto (there's a trenchant explanation of the omission in the booklet). This one does, with a good translation by Christopher Bayton; he must have buried his head in his hands when he received the printed version, with its typos and general muddle. Either recording would grace your collection, as would the DVD of Robert Carsen's modern production led by Barbara Bonney and Paul Agnew.

**Richard Lawrence**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Gardiner (10/83<sup>R</sup>) (ERAT) 2564 63648-7*

*Christie (8/04) (OPAR) DVD OA0899D*







# SONGLINES

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

# Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

## Patrick Cornelius' *Acadia*

**Way of the Cairns**

Whirlwind Recordings WR4766



*Acadia* is a reincarnation of Patrick Cornelius' co-led TransAtlantic quartet that toured prolifically from 2006-9 and released an

eponymous album along the way. The stimulus is the 'great outdoors' of Acadia, the spectacular rocky coastline of the Northeastern tip of Maine. Programmatic jazz of this kind isn't always noteworthy but this is an exception. The themes are mostly on the folky side, with a Celtic-ish kind of feel, creating an airily pastoral ambience in keeping with the bucolic source of inspiration, while the ensemble's sturdy, animated rhythmic backbone reflects its rugged terrain. Bassist Janisch and drummer Paul Wiltgen vigorously drive things

forward, and occasionally they might recall French bassist Henri Texier's boldly anchored folk-based grooves. Estonian-born pianist Kristjan Randalu sounds in his element contrasting infectious folk-dance figures with a few tender explorations of the album's more meditative moments. *Way of the Cairns* is probably Patrick Cornelius' most striking project yet. **Selwyn Harris**

## Joshua Jaswon Octet

**Silent Sea**

Ubuntu Music UBU0065



There's much to admire in this striking new recording from the Joshua Jaswon Octet. As heard on album opener 'Maurice', the octet in full flight packs a joyous punch. Then there's the powerful soloing from Gorodi, Landowski, Doffey and others; the

fluency of the writing; the urgent, galvanising lyrics courtesy of poets Rachael Boast, Jackie Kay and Maura Dooley; not to mention the magnificent contribution of Dutch vocalist Anna Serierse. It's telling to note that Serierse's master's research, which focused on using the voice to blend into an instrumental setting, made particular reference to the great Norma Winstone, and you can certainly hear nods to Winstone in Serierse's approach here. Jaswon, the London-born, Berlin-based sax player, composer and bandleader, employs the full range of textural possibilities which this multinational band offers, from the intimate sound-world of 'Silent Sea', lamenting human greed and environmental pollution, and the vibrant, pleasingly fulsome layerings of 'Extinction' to the hypnotically repeating riffs and stop-start interjections of 'Still Life with Sea Pinks and High Tide'. **Peter Quinn**

# World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

## Sam Amidon

**Sam Amidon**

Nonesuch Records 0075597918281



Sam Amidon, the radical recombinator of traditional folk music, has concocted a delightfully diabolical set of

experiments, unleashing a Frankenstein's monster among the villagers. He borrows liberally from Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* for both foundational material and alchemical inspiration. Drawing from a sonic palette replete with spooky reverb, jazzy tempos and funky percussion, Amidon transforms familiar Appalachian songs, murder ballads and novelty tunes, such as 'Maggie', 'Spanish Merchant's Daughter', 'Pretty Polly' and 'Cuckoo' into new weird ditties imbued with their own compelling power, characters and

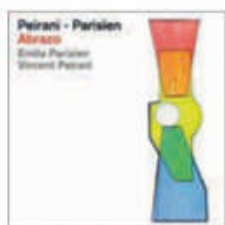
charm. Playing Igor to the Vermont-born, London-based mad scientist's role in the West Hampstead laboratory at HOXA Studios were multi-instrumentalist Shahzad Ismaily and drummer Chris Vatalaro, augmented by Belgian guitarist Bert Cools, bassist Ruth Goller, saxophonist Sam Gendel, and Amidon's wife, Beth Orton, lending harmonising vocals to three tracks.

**Doug DeLoach**

## Vincent Peirani & Emile Parisien

**Abrazo**

ACT ACT 9631-2



Warm, tango-inspired runnings from the Paris-based duo of accordionist Vincent Peirani and soprano saxophonist Emile Parisien. While their leanings have tended to the jazzier end of the spectrum,

this new embrace of tango has all the expertise and invention one might expect. Opening, cleverly, with an adaptation of Jelly Roll Morton's 'The Crave', the duo offer slow-burn loveliness that seems to nod to the genre's roots in the port-side African neighbourhoods of Argentina and Uruguay, their just-so phrasing mapping out the deft footwork of the partner dance expressed in the milongas of Buenos Aires. Tango is usually played on solo guitar, or by an orquesta típica ensemble of violins, flute, piano and two or more bandoneones; Peirani and Parisien's sax-and-accordion combo gives clean new life to Piazzolla's sometimes overwrought 'Fuga y Misterio'. Peirani proves himself a tango composer of merit with three self-penned tracks, though it's Parisien's own, delicate 'Memento' that lingers. The closer, a tangoed take on Kate Bush's glorious 'Army of Dreamers', ties everything up in a bow. **Jane Cornwell**

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# REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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## *Almost complete Wilhelm Kempff*

**Jed Distler** regrets some major omissions from DG's edition of the pianist's recordings

**A**lmost every major pianist whose recordings are controlled by Universal Classics has been given comprehensive box-set treatment, including Arrau, Brendel and Backhaus, just to name the three that I've reviewed in these pages. As such, a comparably thorough Wilhelm Kempff edition has long been overdue. It must be said that this 80-disc collection (retailing for about £205) falls frustratingly short of the mark, as the following discographical housekeeping will explain.

Four previously released Kempff box-sets provide the Edition's organisational backbone, along with the pianist's mono and stereo LP chamber collaborations for DG and the Beethoven Op 5 No 1 Cello Sonata with Pablo Casals issued by Philips. The first of these boxes comprises DG's 1991 reissue of Kempff's mono 1950s Beethoven piano sonata cycle. The second is 2012's 'The Complete Solo Repertoire', a 35-disc collection containing at least one stereo version of every solo composition Kempff recorded for DG, plus Decca recordings of certain works that the pianist did not otherwise record for the yellow label. These two boxes offered bonus discs featuring spoken material and selected pre-war 78s, scattered throughout the present edition. The third box dates from 2013, bringing together all of Kempff's commercial concerto recordings.

With the fourth box, a five-disc 'Original Masters' reissue from 2003, things go awry. This release claimed to contain Kempff's 'complete 1950s solo Brahms and Schumann recordings' for both Decca and DG. It also offered various Decca loose ends and a singleton 1960 stereo Beethoven *Moonlight*, *Pathétique* and *Appassionata* triumvirate, not to be confused with the later versions in Kempff's stereo Beethoven cycle. It omitted Kempff's Decca 1950 Brahms Op 79 Rhapsodies in favour of his 1953 Decca remakes, and the 1953

Op 117 Intermezzos over those from 1950! Fortunately Australian Eloquence put things right when it eventually reissued Kempff's truly complete Decca and DG Brahms and Schumann. The present Kempff Edition omits all of the Decca Schumann and Brahms solo items that Kempff remade for DG in stereo. Likewise, the Decca solo Liszt and Schubert solo items reissued by Eloquence are missing in action. And where, oh where, has Kempff's Bach *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* gone? Figure this: DG's complete Leonard Bernstein, Herbert von Karajan and Carlo Maria Giulini editions include these particular artists' complete Decca output alongside their yellow label holdings. So why Universal's inconsistent attitude towards Kempff's Decca recordings?

### *A thorough Wilhelm Kempff edition has long been overdue*

The Kempff Edition also incorporates two releases licensed from APR that are respectively devoted to pre-war recordings of the late Beethoven sonatas (Nos 24-32) and Kempff's complete wartime Beethoven sonata recordings (dating from 1940-43), all splendidly transferred by Mark Obert-Thorn. Too bad Universal opted for DG's heavily processed masterings of Kempff's shellac-era Beethoven concertos over Obert-Thorn's far superior APR restorations.

Because Kempff recorded prolifically between youth and old age (as did Backhaus), we get a fuller perspective of his interpretative development than we do from, say, Arthur Rubinstein or Artur Schnabel, who only began to record at the midway point of their comparably long careers. Kempff's recorded repertoire

centred around the core Austro-German canon of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Brahms, with occasional forays into Chopin and Liszt. Beethoven's music dominates the pianist's discography from the beginning. In addition to the aforementioned mono and stereo LP cycles, Kempff set down 24 of the 32 sonatas on 78s, eight of them in multiple shellac versions.

In contrast to the large-scale structures, hurling brio and internal drama characterising Schnabel's influential interpretations, Kempff generally approached Beethoven from a more intimate, less cosmic, cameo-like vantage point, elucidating formal niceties through discreet pedal effects, dabs of colour and unexpected yet never exaggerated accents. Tempos tend to even each other out, resulting in quicker slow movements and slower fast movements than the norm. While Kempff's clipped articulation might seem dainty and even salon-like, his strong polyphonic awareness, specificity of inflection and sharply biting *fortissimos* address the essential linearity of Beethoven's aesthetic. In this sense, Kempff brilliantly illuminates the witty Op 7, Op 14 No 2, Op 22, Op 31 Nos 1 and 3 and Op 78 Sonatas, or Op 101's subtle intricacies.

What is more, Kempff's Beethoven conceptions proved remarkably consistent over time, if modified in detail. The elongations of phrase, curvy transitions and sundry tempo modifications of his wartime 'name' sonatas, for example, give way to tighter refinement by the 1950s and '60s. On the other hand, one finds the younger Kempff's technique in fresher, more incisive estate, as the *Pastoral*, *Appassionata* and *Les adieux* finales bear out. In this sense, one regrets that Kempff didn't record the *Eroica* and C minor variation

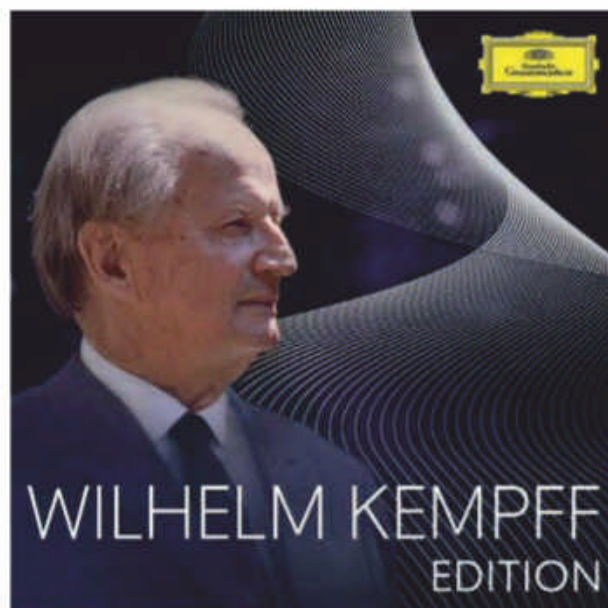


sets in his prime; his rather square and unimaginative stereo traversals frankly came too late. There's little to choose between the mono piano concertos with Paul van Kempen and the stereo remakes under Ferdinand Leitner; both editions feature Kempff's original cadenzas.

Kempff's vividly recorded and sharply balanced K246, 488, 491 and 595 Mozart concerto collaborations with Ferdinand Leitner further illuminate the pianist's ravishing tonal palette. K488's sublime slow movement especially stands out for Kempff's brisk understatement, in contrast to more commonly heard slower, darkly lit interpretations. A pity he didn't record more Mozart, yet his bountiful Schubert legacy deserves its long-held esteem. True, Kempff could be stodgy (the D major D850's first and third movements, the *Wanderer Fantasy*'s outer sections), and his G flat Impromptu slows down and loses momentum as it unfolds. Yet what loving care he generally takes in deceptively inconsequential compositions. Sample the five-movement hybrid D459's second movement, where the pianist's seemingly offhand contouring of melody, accompaniment and inner voices resembles a rarefied string quartet in congenial communion.

The same observation applies to Kempff's Brahms, particularly in the late pieces. Few other performances exemplify Arthur Rubinstein's characterisation of these works as 'chamber music for solo piano'. To cite several examples, Kempff's emphatic, *détaché* punctuation in Op 116 No 1 evokes a small wind ensemble, while the uncommon clarity of No 3's lines crossing from one register to another differs from the heavier pedalling and textural uniformity one often hears. Kempff's ascetic rigour also strips layers of accumulated sentimentality from the three Op 117 Intermezzos.

Neither the Brahms First nor Schumann Concertos represents Kempff at his best but much of his solo Schumann more than holds its own in today's increasingly competitive market. Although I prefer more power and volatility in the *Dauidsbiindlertänze*, *Carnaval* and *Humoreske* than Kempff offers, he transforms *Papillons*, *Kinderszenen* and *Waldszenen* into miniature tone poems. His mono *Symphonic Etudes* is on a more



secure technical footing than the later stereo version, and one could argue the same regarding the mono *Kreiseriana* and C major *Fantasia*'s brighter overall tempos. However, I prefer the latter two in stereo for Kempff's heightened angularity and greater breadth of dynamics.

Kempff chose his Liszt selectively. His austere demeanour and terraced voice-leading in the 'Canzonetta del Salvator Rosa' (from the second *Année de pèlerinage*) manages to make this piece sound interesting for once, while his line-orientated Petrarch Sonnets provide an intriguing and convincing antipode to the red-blooded ardour of Arrau or Bolet. However, by 1974 the two St Francis *Légendes* had lost a good degree of vitality and shimmer in comparison to Kempff's incredible 1950 Decca versions. Engineer Kenneth Wilkinson recalled Kempff being below form during his 1954 Liszt concerto sessions. To my ears, Kempff's sobriety and tempered bravura fit hand in glove within Anatole Fistoulari's vividly detailed orchestral framework. Here these two works sound like bona fide concertos rather than a piano backed by orchestral window

dressings. Kempff's underplayed, ultra-cautious Chopin was never competitive. Granted, the Impromptus and Barcarolle pass lyrical muster, and one must credit the pianist's rapturous Berceuse. Elsewhere Kempff limps uphill, as in the unbearably slow C sharp minor Scherzo's coda and F minor *Fantasia*'s upward scales, to say nothing of the B minor Sonata's heavy-going, tensionless finale.

However, the aged Kempff's capacity for wizardry rested in the music of JS Bach. No doubt his youthful experience as an organist informed his Bach pianism with

a fusion of colouristic allure and contrapuntal cogency. Note the chiaroscuro textural layers he conjures from his beguiling transcriptions, or the G minor *English Suite*'s delicate interplay between hands. Years ago I extravagantly described Kempff's Gigue from the Fifth *French Suite* as 'quietly emerging out of the preceding Louré's shadow, evoking a chest of whistles played by laughing elves'. Such purple prose, I admit, but I meant every word of it, and still do. Some consider Kempff's *Goldberg Variations* too plain, with its

(in)famously unembellished Aria, avoidance of virtuoso sheen and overall moderation. But if you meet the pianist halfway, you'll come to love the natural ebb and flow and melodic cogency of his phrasing, and appreciate his assiduous long-range tempo relationships.

For all the treasures (and occasional falls from grace) comprising this collection, I still regret the previously cited omissions. These extend to Kempff shellac discs that remain in catalogue limbo (Schumann and Mendelssohn works that he never recorded elsewhere, alternative Beethoven sonata performances on 78s, etc). Indeed, a truly comprehensive Kempff edition could have been within easy reach, had Universal's A&R team taken the trouble and initiative. That said, 85 per cent of Kempff complete is better than no Kempff at all, and listeners new to this pianist will encounter a singular, original and sincere artist who fortunately enjoyed the recording process. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS

### Wilhelm Kempff Edition

DG © (80 discs) 483 9075



# A century of Polish music

**Peter Quantrill** admires an ambitious project ranging from Szymanowski to the present day

Imagine if the NMC label and the publishers Faber Music were merged and nationalised. Imagine, then, that the resulting organisation (call it BritNote) settled on a watershed moment – the end of the First World War, say – and created a history of British music between then and now. A repertoire committee would be formed, to select one piece per year over the century. The state would finance orchestras, solo musicians and singers to make new recordings. A tie-in book would tell the story. A properly maintained website would sell the scores and continue to promote the new work of modern composers.

Such a project would raise all sorts of questions. Take 1945: *A Young Person's Guide* or *Peter Grimes*? And 1986: Birtwistle's *Earth Dances* or Harvey's *Madonna of Winter and Spring*? More widely, how would BritNote differ in tone and mission from Communist-era labels such as Melodiya, Jugoton and Electrecord? What about ex-pat composers, the likes of Ferneyhough and Saunders? Would they count as sufficiently 'British'?

So fantastical an endeavour now at least has a precedent, sponsored by the Polish Ministry of Culture: **100 for 100: Musical Decades of Freedom**. Originally produced by PWM Edition to mark a century since the foundation of the modern Polish republic on Armistice Day 1918, the new English version of the box arrives in the shape of a small cabin bag. An upper shelf therein holds 36 separate CDs; on the lower shelf, A5-size booklets for each decade present biographies of every composer and (less useful) notes on the pieces, prefaced by the opening pages of each score. A 280-page history by Danuta Gwizdalanka is separately bound, lavishly illustrated and intelligently translated. The CD track-lists (some of the radio recordings rather light on data) are laid out in a final booklet, along with – something of a rarity – brief, pertinent and properly written artist biographies. Ticket price? About £277.

Opening with the *Songs of the Infatuated Muezzin* affirms Szymanowski as the father of modern Polish music. More than that, it establishes themes – ecstatic vocalise, impressionistic orchestration, the French influence, an escapist mode of expression, a translation of distant cultures and hotter climates into a specifically Polish

context – to be encountered throughout the box in works as disparate as Ludomir Różycki's ballet *Apollo and the Maiden* (1937), Grażyna Bacewicz's *Pensieri notturni* (1961) or the cool, Messiaen-like opulence of *Le soleil* (1991) by Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil, up to the more rippling, Boulezian textures of the *Canzon de' baci* (2013) by Andrzej Kwieciński.

Listeners familiar with all these names will already be dedicated students of modern Polish music, in possession of Adrian Thomas's synoptic guide (CUP: 2005) or at least Bernard Jacobson's still invaluable introduction to *A Polish Renaissance* (Phaidon: 1996). Even for specialists, though, the opportunity to move beyond reading to listening offers revelations galore. The repertoire committee has cast its favours generously, representing 87 composers among the 101 pieces, over 60 of them hitherto unknown to me or, at best, names in a dictionary.

## The opportunity to move beyond reading to listening offers revelations galore

And so, on the heels of the Muezzin's familiar pleasures (sung here with gorgeous restraint by the soprano Barbara Zagórzanka), run the Romantically orientated but not reactionary strains of Kazimierz Sikorski and Apolinary Szeluto. The *Fantasmagories* song-cycle (1920, presented here in a claustrophobic Dux-licensed recording) by Ludomir Rogowski lends a stronger Slavic accent to the Muezzin's erotic melismas. The half-hour, two-act ballet *Świtezianka* (1922) by Eugeniusz Morawski is a real find, the first of many in the set, scored with the opulence of Bartók at his most Straussian and based on a tragic-mermaid plot like *Rusalka* and Zemlinsky's *Die Seejungfrau*.

The style of *Świtezianka*, refined by French techniques but rooted in local folk dances, strikingly anticipates Szymanowski's *Harnasie* of 1931, but then so does Michał Kondracki's *Little Highlander Symphony* of 1930, subtitled 'Pictures on Glass' after the technique of the painters who, like Szymanowski, made their home in the Tatra mountain town of Zakopane during the 1920s. The crisp Sinfonia Varsovia performance was

recorded for Polish radio in 2007 but, like so much else here, it has no competition on disc; and while the many newly commissioned recordings are available for streaming, such licensed recordings are exclusive to the physical box. However, discovering more about the forgotten figure of Kondracki is made easier by the brief introductions to each piece on PWM Edition's YouTube channel, most of them subtitled in English and often going into greater depth than the work-booklets.

In a project centred on music for and with orchestra, the pianistic heritage of the émigré Chopin receives passing attention: first in the two volumes of elliptical, Scriabinesque Preludes composed by Alexandre Tansman in 1921 and played with a light touch by Ignacy Lisiecki (no relation of Jan, it appears). Hefty concertos by Tansman (1925) and Józef Koffler (1932) lack the flair of the Concertino (1940) composed by Władysław Szpilman (immortalised in Roman Polanski's film) shortly before he and his family were confined to the Warsaw Ghetto.

As leader of the camp orchestra at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Szymon Laks also survived the very worst of Nazi persecution; his *Polish Suite* (1935) is just one of several examples here of a neoclassical, folkloristic idiom in search of an individual voice. This *Pulcinella-Petrushka* style finds a happier home in the escapist fantasy of *Cagliostro in Warsaw* (1938), a ballet score by Jan Adam Maklakiewicz concerning an 18th-century Italian alchemist and con artist.

From the depths of war in 1944 we encounter a rare example of chamber music (with no orchestras to write for, composers were thinking small) in the originally scored Quintet for clarinet, bassoon, violin, cello and piano by Constantin Regamey, a Polish counterpart to the *Quartet for the End of Time* which handles stasis with no less assurance than Shostakovich in the first movement of the Sixth Symphony. By contrast, the post-war Socialist Realist symphonies by Bolesław Woytowicz and Zbigniew Turski could usefully have done with Shostakovich's light touch in the Ninth; this period of the box is hard work, brightened only by another gem of a forgotten ballet: *The Peaks* (1950) by Artur Malawski, a folk tale set, like *Harnasie*, in the Tatra mountains with a *Les noces*-like choral element.





Composer-performer Agata Zubel suggests new music is alive and well in today's Poland

One notable and, I think, admirable feature of the chosen repertoire is that a given composer is represented by neither their biggest nor necessarily their best work. The reasons may be financial and circumstantial – the structural grid of one work per year pushing some pieces into prominence and obscuring others of superficially more lasting significance – but it gives the overall box texture, making it more like a living history and indeed resembling the carefully controlled chance procedures that became a signature of Lutosławski's work. His Second Symphony (1967) demands inclusion under the 'influential masterpieces' theory. Here it is supplanted by a five-minute piece of electronica, *Dixi* by Eugeniusz Rudnik. Yet the presence of Rudnik represents a no less significant development, the engineer-turned-composer, the often turbulent union of technology and music that brought us the troubled child of IRCAM in Paris.

Listeners familiar with the legend of Piotr Zak, the archetypal but fictional representative of the '60s avant garde cooked up by Hans Keller and Susan Bradshaw in a Third Programme studio, may find their prejudices confirmed by the flurries and full-stops – all punctuation, no sentence – of Bolesław Szabelski's *Aphorisms 9* (1962). On the other hand,

they may be confounded by the teeming polyphonic life of *Anekumena* (1974), a 'concerto for 89 instruments' by Barbara Buczek, and the plaintive, accordion-saturated claustrophobia of *Programme IV* (1975) by Andrzej Krzanowski which sent me scurrying away once again to find out more online.

Lutosławski, Górecki, Panufnik and Penderecki are all duly honoured with multiple appearances (Weinberg receives comparatively belated and short shrift with the Fourth Chamber Symphony of 1992), but the value of '100 for 100' lies in filling out the picture. Even in 1973, at the height of the Warsaw Autumn period when Polish composers overtook their foreign peers in the vanguard of new music, the opera-ballet and folk heritage survives in Juliusz Łuciuk's *The Love of Orpheus*, as if half-recalled through a fog of liberated dissonance (though the absence of both sung texts and translations is the box's one serious drawback).

Another, often submerged thread surfaces through the last quarter of the survey. As probably the most devout nation in Europe, Poland and its people always drew strength from faith during periods of oppression by invaders from



all sides. A trio of Passion settings, by Penderecki (1966), Krzysztof Knittel (2004) and Paweł Mykietyn (2008), traces the evolution of the genre with the times, gathering up electronica and rock along the way. Even so, the recrudescence of a right-wing, family-first ideology in Poland has not inhibited the rude health of its new music culture in the hands of extrovert composer-performers such as Agata Zubel (*Not I* from 2010) and Jagoda Szmytka (*electrified memories of bloody cherries*, 2011). You could, pre-Covid, fly to Kraków for the price of the box, stay the night, drop by one of its many music festivals and enjoy a proper lunch at Pod Baranem into the bargain. Not for now: buy this instead. **G**

### THE RECORDINGS

**Various Cpsrs** '100 for 100: Musical Decades of Freedom'

**Various artists**

Anaklasis © (36 discs) ANABOX



# Maria João Pires on DG

**Michelle Assay** revisits the Portuguese pianist's collected recordings for the yellow label

Technically speaking, this is not just a reissue but almost entirely a re-reissue. Already in 2014, to celebrate Maria João Pires's 70th birthday, DG released a box set of her complete solo recordings for the label between 1989 and 2013 (she has since transferred to Onyx). This was followed by two more DG volumes of their complete concerto and chamber recordings with her. By my calculation the new 'Limited Edition' box has just one previously unreissued disc. This pairs Schumann's *Kinderszenen* with an unfamiliar aspect of Pires's musicianship, her accompaniment of Portuguese fado songs, for which the accompanying booklet provides no background information and no texts.

DG's marketing refers to a '72-page booklet with new liner notes by Harriet Smith'. Well, Harriet's notes are certainly engaging and informative. But they occupy only four pages. The rest is taken up by the list of works on each disc and an index of all the featured composers. Given that Pires's repertoire is quite narrow (essentially from Bach to Debussy) and only three discs have more than one composer included in the programme, the index seems rather pointless, especially given that the discs are organised in alphabetical order of composers.

If only those 72 pages could have found space for an interview or at least some statements by her and her collaborators. Pires is not just an extraordinary pianist but also an extraordinary human being, for whom the message of music and all the arts matters far more than any individual's glory. No wonder the most common words used of her are on the lines of 'selfless', 'subservient to music', 'without any trace of narcissism' ... Even her most interventionist recordings are imbued with honesty and devotion – a prime example being the only Bach disc of the collection, where she has no qualms about making full use of the modern piano. As she has said in interview, she is never concerned with 'seducing' the audience; she aims not 'to please' her listeners but 'to love them; to be together with them and to enjoy the music together'. So there is almost always something transcendental and spiritual about her pianism, even if her interpretations may not be entirely to one's taste.

For a pianist often labelled as a Mozartian, her Mozart sonatas are not as subtle as I would have expected, though



they are definitely superior to her survey for Denon in the 1970s. For all Pires's captivating sprightliness, I still find Mitsuko Uchida, for one, more acutely attuned to Mozart's blend of vitality and tenderness. Nor was I as overwhelmed by her Chopin Nocturnes as Bryce Morrison was in these pages (10/96). But even in such cases, her absorption in the music and her trust in what she considers its essence infallibly draws the listener in.

## There is almost always something transcendental about her pianism

While in the first of Beethoven's two Op 27 Sonatas *quasi una fantasia* freedom has the upper hand, in the *Moonlight* fantasy is tempered by discipline, leading one to question why so many others find it hard to avoid over- or understatement. This is a very special disc indeed, for it is the first recording to be made at her farm in Belgais, where in 1999 she started a venture akin to Venezuela's El Sistema: what she called 'an experimental primary school to introduce the arts to people who have no access to culture'. Pires's vision was shattered when in 2009 a series of media attacks followed by difficulties with government subsidy forced her to turn her

back on her homeland and move to Brazil. However, the project was revived almost a decade later and now exists as the Belgais Center for Arts, offering musical retreats and workshops as well as concerts.

It was in the same setting and as part of the same vision that Pires recorded Schumann's *Kinderszenen* in 2002. Here each track is preceded with the title being announced in Portuguese by the actor F Pedro Oliveira – rather a pointless distraction for anyone not actually in attendance. No information is offered in the booklet, but it seems the recording belongs to a Universal Music Portugal disc entitled 'Sons de Belgais', a collaboration that brought together music for and about children. Pires plays with exceptional intensity, placing each piece in a magical land of purity and innocence. Here, as in all her Schumann repertoire, Pires is at her best and most natural, pairing effortless spontaneity with poetic lyricism.

At the heart of Pires's musicianship lies her chamber-music partnerships (she has repeatedly admitted her dislike for solo recitals) and the chamber discs in this collection are all of the highest quality: from the exhilarating tension with Augustin Dumay's more temperamental approach to her discreet partnership with Douglas Boyd's oboe and the seamless meeting of minds in the Schumann Quintet, these are consistently first-rate performances. Another special disc is her 2013 Wigmore Hall concert with cellist Antonio Meneses, which also includes a breathtaking performance of Brahms's Op 117 Intermezzos.

Pires's Mozart concertos with Abbado have become the stuff of legend; but I find her Schumann Concerto (with Abbado) and her Chopin F minor with Previn even more persuasive. Unfortunately DG doesn't give us her teaming-up with Boulez in Mozart's D minor from the 2003 Europakonzert in Lisbon, which doesn't feature in the previous complete concerto recordings either.

Pires has never claimed to be an uber-virtuoso, and the finale of the Chopin B minor Sonata tests her to the very limit. But these discs offer triumphant proof that selfless dedication trumps self-regard. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS

**Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon Maria João Pires**  
DG © (38 discs) 483 8880



# BOX-SET *Round-up*

**Rob Cowan** considers collections evoking the frozen north and the sun-kissed south

**W**arner Classics' neat doorstep **Ravel: The Complete Works**, which comes packaged with a superb new essay by Roger Nichols, calls on a vast range of recordings from godawful piano rolls by the composer himself and Robert Casadesus (straightforward shellac-based historical recordings, also included, are far more convincing) to superior stereo versions of the piano works by the likes of Samson François, Anne Queffélec and Bertrand Chamayou, as well as countless rarities. André Cluytens's tangy complete *Daphnis* ballet is, for me at least, the best of its time (topping even Munch and Monteux for character) and Simon Rattle's complete Birmingham *Mother Goose* is for the most part exquisitely tooled, whereas Armin Jordan takes care of *L'heure espagnole* and Mikko Franck leads *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, which socks it you emotionally, reminding us of Ravel's own adage that 'music ... must be emotional first and intellectual second'.

Then again, **Sibelius** famously said of his Fourth Symphony that there's 'absolutely nothing of the circus about it', meaning I suppose that it excavates the soul's depths rather than taking flight. Osmo Vänska's latest performance, while occasionally gaining speed on its Lahti predecessor (9/97), presses for desolation and dissonance, terror too, especially in the finale. Viewed overall Vänska's Minnesota cycle, now boxed with *Kullervo* for company, ups the ante in terms of excitement and tension. The Fifth's first movement hurtles recklessly towards a heated coda; the First's Scherzo crackles like lightning; and the Seventh braves a hazardous path towards its hard-won C major triumph. The Third's second movement is a relaxed *quasi allegretto*, the finale being nicely animated, as is the last movement of the Sixth. Vänska's Minnesota Sibelius is direct and energetic, its powerful atmosphere achieved more through honesty than affectation, the darkly purposeful second movement of the Second being typical. The sound is magnificent and the box includes the full booklets for the original single CDs.

**Mariss Jansons's** approach to Sibelius (Symphonies Nos 3 and 5, plus two versions each of Nos 1 and 2 and shorter



works in Warner Classics' 'The Oslo Years' box) courts fewer extremes than Vänska's, certainly in Nos 1 and 5, but wears an endearingly human face, whether on disc or on (first-time) video. Best in this well-produced Warner set are Shostakovich's Symphonies Nos 1, 5, 6 and 9, all of them cast in the Mravinsky mould, in other words sleek, dynamic and invariably swift. Saint-Saëns's Third features a finale where organist Wayne Marshall thunders the massive opening chord like no one else on disc (the orchestra is in Oslo, the organ in Rouen). Dvořák's Symphonies Nos 5, 7, 8 and 9 and the Cello Concerto (Truls Mørk) work well, the Fifth especially, its pastoral mood pinpointed to a T, whereas Jansons's Honegger – Symphonies Nos 2 and 3 and *Pacific 231* – is consistently gripping. Of various DVD first releases, Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* (in mono) burns an indelible course, one of Jansons's finest Tchaikovsky performances as recorded. A single reading of Respighi's *Feste romane* is included twice, once in the context of the whole Roman Trilogy, all of it good I'd say rather than exceptional. A disc of Wagner orchestral excerpts on the other hand is exceptional, Siegfried's Funeral Music with its important harp parts clearly audible, the *Rienzi* Overture a sunny romp. Other works are by Richard Strauss, Franck, Mahler, Stravinsky, Beethoven, Svendsen (Symphonies Nos 1 and 2), Mussorgsky, Prokofiev, Smetana, Ravel (a marvellous *Daphnis* Second Suite) and Bartók, as well as various 'world encores', all of which confirm Jansons's ability to draw from his orchestra superb playing.

For Jansons at his very best, however, I'd recommend a recent all-**Bruckner** set on BR-Klassik covering Symphonies Nos 3, 4 and 6-9 (Jansons was planning to perform the Fifth before he died). Jansons avoids the questionable extremes of churchly pretension and excessive weight of tone. Instead, we're offered a more Schubertian exegesis, warm yet clear in texture with an expert manipulation of tempos, especially

in the Sixth Symphony's first movement, where contrasting metres interconnect as a single untroubled line. Other highlights include the Third Symphony's polka-style finale (I'm thinking in particular of the second subject, so liltingly played), the Seventh's first-movement coda – such a perfect arch – and the whole of the Ninth, the Scherzo obdurate and broadly paced. The Eighth's highlight, on the other hand, is its profoundly moving *Adagio*. The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra play magnificently throughout.

So much for northern climes. Heading off to the warmer south with the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, Naxos has usefully boxed the complete **Villa-Lobos** symphonies, 12 works of varying lengths which, while often calling on exotic percussion as expected, also take in such influences as Debussy and Rimsky-Korsakov, the Tenth being a hybrid symphony and oratorio. Anyone attracted to the better-known *Chôros* and *Bachianas Brasileiras* will enjoy the way this Brazilian master rows his boat to different shores, always with a good deal of imagination. Isaac Karabtchevsky directs secure and consistently colourful performances and the sound is excellent, as is necessary given the composer's wide-ranging orchestrations. The package accommodates all six discs as originally issued, including the booklets. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS

**Ravel** Complete Works **Various artists**

Warner Classics © (21 discs) 9029 52832-6

**Sibelius** Symphonies. Kullervo

Minnesota Orch / Vänska

BIS (M) ④ BIS2506

**Various Cpsrs** 'The Oslo Years'

Oslo PO / Jansons Warner Classics

© (21 CDs + ⑤ DVD) 9029 52424-7

**Bruckner** Symphonies Nos 3, 4 & 6-9

Bavarian RSO / Jansons

BR-Klassik (B) ⑥ 900718

**Villa-Lobos** Complete Symphonies

São Paulo SO / Karabtchevsky

Naxos © ⑥ 8 506039



# REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



## Mercury magic

**M**ercury Living Presence productions are largely associated with big Romantic blockbusters and vividly scored 20th-century repertoire, music that feeds off dramatically polarised stereo, razor-sharp strings and brass, vivid percussion, incendiary climaxes and the sort of upfront balancing that you'd normally only experience if you were either on the rostrum or seated in the orchestra. The label's Classical legacy, meaning in the main Mozart and Haydn, employs many of those same production priorities to achieve impressive levels of internal clarity and Eloquence's four-CD set of **Antal Dorati**-led performances triumphantly proves the point with some remarkably fine Mercury recordings.

In the case of Haydn with the Philharmonia Hungarica, (Bath) Festival Chamber Orchestra and LSO, the obvious question to ask is: how do these performances compare with the slightly later ones that Dorati made as part of his complete Haydn symphony cycle for Decca? Interesting point, and I'd say that in general these earlier versions sound rather more fastidiously prepared. In the case of the *Fire* Symphony, No 59, with the Festival Chamber Orchestra, the finale, taken at a swifter, more flowing pace than on the Decca remake, includes the repeat (as Antony Hodgson's excellent booklet note makes clear) whereas the later version doesn't. And 1'20" into the *Drumroll's* finale (No 103) this earlier Philharmonia Hungarica version builds with rather more tension than does its Decca successor.

The LSO Haydn recordings are well prepared and sensibly paced, the *Clock* (No 101) especially, with prominent percussion volleys beefing up the *Military* Symphony (No 100) – as you might expect given Mercury's audio priorities – while to say that under Dorati for Mercury the same symphony's thrilling finale is supercharged is an understatement. By contrast, the high point of Dorati's LSO *Farewell* Symphony (No 45) comes when, beyond especially tense (as opposed to merely swift) accounts of the first and third movements, the leave-taking finale arrives, ultimately sounding more sorrowful and

tender than on most other recordings I've personally encountered. The same CD – the set's third – also includes uncommonly compelling accounts of Symphonies Nos 81 (Festival CO) and 94 (PH).

As to Mozart, further comparisons present themselves when lining up two versions of Symphony No 40 in G minor, one in mono with the Minneapolis Symphony, the other a more open-sounding stereo remake with the LSO. As Hodgson points out, there are major differences. For a start, the Minneapolis first movement hastily clocks out at 6'49" whereas its colourful LSO successor is

### Mercury Living Presence achieved impressive levels of internal clarity

a more relaxed – and dare I say more textually attentive – 8'06". Both versions include the first-movement repeat while the finale's repeat is omitted in Minneapolis, then reinstated in London; and as for the 'wonderfully steady' Minuet (Hodgson's words, not mine) I much prefer Dorati's lighter touch in London. Also included are accounts of the *Linz* Symphony (No 36), *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* and various shorter works, as well as the finale of the work known as Symphony No 51 (the first two movements are taken from the Overture to the opera *La finta giardiniera*), with the FO. Many of these recordings are receiving their first Decca CD release; every disc tops the 80-minute mark and the transfers are beyond reproach. A set to prize, I'd say.

Speaking of transfers, I was quite taken aback when as part of a Schubert/Mozart Eloquence 'twofer', **Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt's** sensitively paced LSO account of Schubert's Sixth (the *Allegro moderato* finale in particular works really well) arrived in mono, especially as it was recorded on the same day as a pleasingly vigorous stereo Mozart *Jupiter* Symphony (No 41), also included. As it turns out, the stereo tape of the Schubert has vanished, but I'm grateful that rather than call on a noisy stereo vinyl pressing to compensate, Eloquence instead decided

to opt for an extremely clean transfer of the mono equivalent. It still sounds pretty good. The same release features, in addition to the *Jupiter*, a warmly empathetic reading of Mozart's Symphony No 39, a doggedly emphatic account of Schubert's *Tragic* Symphony (No 4) under Walter Susskind and, best of all, a stunningly played LSO Weber *Oberon* Overture where Dorati takes the reins.

Excellent notes from Peter Quantrill, by the way, who also annotates a collection of sympathetic performances of works by Dvořák and Brahms under Schmidt-Isserstedt, whose approach to Dvořák's Seventh with the Hamburg RSO marries robustness to poetic responsiveness (specifically in the *Poco adagio*). A beautifully played and recorded NDR Symphony Orchestra coupling of the two Serenades – E major for strings and D major for winds, both taped in stereo – has a real glow to it, the E major's opening movement blossoming as it builds. The package is completed by nicely characterised performances of selected Dvořák *Slavonic Dances* and Brahms *Hungarian Dances*. On this showing Schmidt-Isserstedt joins a select group of European conductors (I might also cite the likes of Ernest Ansermet, Hans Rosbaud, Ernest Bour, Adrian Boult and Michael Gielen in the same breath) whose pooled gift was to accurately project the music in their charge rather than draw attention to their own personalities. We need more of their ilk.

### THE RECORDINGS



**Haydn. Mozart** Symphonies.   
Orch Wks **Dorati**  
Decca Eloquence  
Ⓢ ⓐ ELQ484 0385



**Mozart. Schubert** Symphonies  
**Schmidt-Isserstedt et al**  
Decca Eloquence  
Ⓑ ⓐ ELQ484 0353



**Dvorak. Brahms** Orch Wks  
**Schmidt-Isserstedt**  
Decca Eloquence  
Ⓑ ⓐ ELQ484 0365





Antal Dorati: his classical legacy was well preserved by Mercury Living Presence, and now by Eloquence

## Celebrating Ida Haendel

Losing the nonagenarian violinist Ida Haendel this past July shut off a glorious playing era that embraced levels of warmth, virtuosity, persuasive musicianship and personality that were very much part of performance practice in the 19th and early-mid-20th centuries, and only reached as far as the 21st largely because of Haendel herself. Eloquence's generous 'rush-release', limited-edition retrospective – her complete Decca legacy, in fact – is devoted in the main to shellac recordings from the 1940s, including concertos by Mendelssohn (under Malcolm Sargent, 1945), Dvořák (with Karl Rankl conducting, 1947) and Tchaikovsky (with cuts, under Basil Cameron, 1945). The overriding impression here is of a budding talent riding high on a facilitating technique, the tone rich and vibrant, the manner of expression very much that of Haendel's finest older contemporaries (whose playing she adored).

Beethoven's Sonata No 8 performed with pianist Noel Mewton-Wood, although breathless, is certainly exhilarating but perhaps the shorter pieces, variously accompanied, make the biggest impression. OK, Bloch's *Abodah* mightn't sail quite as high as it does in the hands of its dedicatee, Yehudi Menuhin, but Joseph Achron's *Hebrew Melody* tugs at the heart-strings even more forcefully than it does when Heifetz is playing, while other 'genre' pieces parade qualities that any aspiring fiddler might envy, even if Sargent's faint praise, as related in Alan Sanders's superb note, that 'you play remarkably well, young lady, but you

have much to learn', contains a tiny grain of truth.

Haendel is surely at her very best on the recordings she made for Supraphon ('The Prague Recordings, 1957-1965' – 10/14), though the Sibelius Concerto included here (1982, under the perceptive baton of Zubin Mehta for the Huberman Festival) is only marginally less impressive than the Prague recording under Karel Ančerl, not to mention versions with Paavo Berglund and Simon Rattle. For me the only qualified success is a single-disc programme with pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy which I reviewed in these pages in May 2000 and where, although full of praise for Haendel herself, I was rather troubled by the way 'Ashkenazy's pianistic outspokenness tends to take over'. The major work programmed on that disc is Enescu's Third Sonata, which enjoys keener inflections and a more acute sense of local colour as performed by Haendel with pianist Ronald Turini in February 1980 (Doremi DHR7756). But don't let me dissuade you from investing in the set under review, which is superbly planned and full of treasurable tracks, not least a first release of *The Lark Ascending* memorably conducted by Roger Norrington in 1997 (LPO), in which Haendel's solitary Lark seems greeted by decidedly mortal feelings. The shellac material is beautifully transferred by Mark Obert-Thorn.

### THE RECORDING




**The Decca Legacy Ida Haendel**  
Decca Eloquence  
© © ELQ484 1688

## Elgar from 1940s New York

Another work closely associated with Haendel was Elgar's Violin Concerto, which she programmed on numerous occasions and invariably performed with a sense of rapt involvement. Yehudi Menuhin's way with the concerto burns brightest on his 1932 recording with the composer conducting – at least that's my view – but this 1945 recording from NBC's notoriously dry Studio 8H, although cut (the slow movement and, most conspicuously, the finale) contains much glorious playing.

Best is the first movement, where Malcolm Sargent takes charge with unflinching command, much as he would do in London a few years later for Heifetz, and the NBC Symphony respond with feeling and intelligence. Listen from 2'52" in the first movement for Menuhin's impassioned initial entry, or 11'17", or from 5'52" in the finale, and witness the weight of emotion expressed. The slow movement is touched by ardour and emotional directness while the finale – complete with accompanied cadenza – features much fine playing.

At this stage of his career Menuhin was still at the top of his game; and although in 1940, the year NBC broadcast Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*, Arturo Toscanini was already into his seventies, he too was very much in his prime. This broadcast recording has been doing the rounds either above or below ground for many years but I don't think I've ever heard a finer restoration than the one Lani Spahr has prepared for this highly desirable Somm release. The performance itself courts extremes, both in terms of tempo and modes of attack, but the ultimate effect is moving and the playing itself is superb (plenty of expressive vibrato). Sargent's 1945 account of *Cockaigne* might suffer the odd smudge, playing-wise, but the spirit is spot on, and not only in the more boisterous episodes; Sargent has his NBC strings opt for a songful approach to Elgar's indelible melodies. A super disc, then, very well annotated by Spahr himself. 

### THE RECORDING



**Elgar 'Elgar from America, Vol 2'**  
Menuhin; NBC SO /  
Sargent, Toscanini  
Somm © ARIADNE 5008



# Classics RECONSIDERED



**Andrew Achenbach**  
and **David Gutman**  
reassess George Szell's  
'dazzling' recording  
from 1961 of Walton's  
Second Symphony



## Walton

### Symphony No 2

Cleveland Orchestra / George Szell

Epic & Sony Classical

Are there any red faces here that the first recording of Walton's Second Symphony should come to us from across the Atlantic? Well, the magnificent Cleveland Orchestra – which surely can rarely have played more finely, or been better recorded, than on this disc – has a certain prescriptive right to these works: for it gave the first American performance of this symphony (whose world premiere was by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic at the Edinburgh Festival in 1960), and Walton wrote the Partita for its 40th anniversary with its 'wonderful players

in mind, hoping that they may enjoy playing it'.

The symphony's first movement is [the Partita's] blood brother, as a hearing immediately after the earlier work makes plain – the same sinewy nervous energy, the same major seventh leaps, which are so characteristic of the composer. When first heard, the symphony was received with some disappointment by the press: the charge seemed to be that Walton was breaking no new ground and was adhering, in a period of militant avant-gardisme, to a late-Romantic idiom. But other composers have equally shown consistency of style without being blamed for so doing; and the readiness with which the symphony has been taken up in many parts of the world

proves that the public has nothing whatever against this musical language. Not, in any case, that this could even remotely be called a 'comfortable' work: the beautifully scored *Lento* is mainly contemplative and elegiac, but the two outer movements are full of sardonic energy and high spirits – the final Passacaglia (built on a theme employing all 12 semitones) is particularly brilliant. If the work has a fault, it may lie in the liberal use of rhetorical figures familiar in all Walton's music, and in not stirring the heart as did the First Symphony; but if it does not strike so deep, it will nevertheless give pleasure to many. Walton's warm praise for the orchestra's phrasing, balance and virtuosity in general will be echoed by all.

**Lionel Salter** (9/62)

**Andrew Achenbach** From the outset of his career, George Szell was a doughty champion of Walton's music, programming the First Symphony (1935) with both the Scottish Orchestra and Sydney SO – the latter concert part of a busy Australian tour (20 concerts in 12 weeks) prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. By the time he set down this dazzling world-premiere recording of the Second Symphony over two separate days in February and March 1961, he had already given the work its Continental European premiere the previous November with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in The Hague (having met the composer for the very first time a few days earlier in Amsterdam), followed by performances in Cleveland and New York. (Between March and December 1961, Szell also conducted the symphony in Washington DC, Cologne and Chicago.) Lack of proper rehearsal time had ensured a less-than-satisfactory first outing for the work under John Pritchard at the 1960

Edinburgh Festival (EMI even pulled the plug on a planned recording). Szell, on the other hand, was intent on making his pioneering version a definitive statement.

**David Gutman** I'm not sure it was lack of rehearsal time that torpedoed the world premiere. How Pritchard ever enjoyed a reputation as an effective proponent of new music is a mystery to me, but then I only encountered him in the flesh near the end of his career. Taking up a score widely dismissed as a low-key appendage to a failed opera (*Troilus and Cressida*), Szell has it sound like a fresh departure. The writing might not be 'radical' in the manner of Dutilleux's *Métaboles*, Szell's vaguely contemporaneous Cleveland commission, but it certainly makes demands. With neo-classicism (and tonal music in general) supposedly old hat on both sides of the Atlantic, Walton's finale is a set of variations on a 12-tone theme. On one level, though, that's a highly wrought joke.

We're in a world of Gallic elegance, reliant on snappy articulation and absolute textural clarity. Yes, we get those in spades but, playing devil's advocate, how do you rate the recorded sound? It does amplify the combative aspect of the performance.

**AA** Sure, the sound's punchy and inevitably a little thin by modern standards, but there's still plenty of detail, ambient glow and atmosphere – especially vital in the gorgeously sultry slow movement (where the echoes of *Troilus* are most potent). Look, it's impossible not to be blown away by the Clevelanders' silvery sheen, razor-sharp ensemble and exhilarating rhythmic snap – to say nothing of Szell's thrusting cogency and unassailable mastery of balance – but in the opening movement does that 'combative' dimension you rightly register come at the expense of some expressive warmth? Both André Previn and Edward Gardner do find a touch more gleeful mischief here. I'm also left wondering





George Szell, at the helm of his mighty Cleveland Orchestra, recorded a memorable Walton Symphony No 2

whether the finale's exuberant fugato and coda shouldn't convey a marginally greater sense of fun – something Sir Charles Mackerras's roistering LSO account has by the bucket-load. Or am I being just being absurdly nit-picky?

**DG** Not at all. My sound system doesn't get much Mediterranean warmth out of the grooves of the LP and there's a distractingly primitive editing glitch or other mishap 7'37" into the slow movement, preserved also on my CD transfer. High-end remastering might help 'humanise' the effect and resolve that. Still, it's obvious why LS, like Walton himself, was floored by the results and it may be that such incredible corporate discipline could only be achieved at the expense of some degree of colour and flexibility.

**AA** Yes, in the slow movement Gardner is fractionally more supple than either Szell or Previn, the towering climax smouldering with positively operatic passion (to date, I gather Gardner has only conducted Christopher Palmer's orchestral suite from *Troilus and Cressida*).

**DG** Szell is fantastically seamless but a bit severe, as if anxious to expunge any cinematic associations. For me, not even his performance quite conveys the extent to which the opening movement (*Allegro molto*) floats on air, consciously (?) upending the way the corresponding *Allegro assai* of the First Symphony grinds along 'from the bottom up'. The Sibelian pedal points have gone but Szell certainly keeps things lean and mean.

**AA** It never occurred to me to view the opening movement through the prism, as it were, of its counterpart in the First Symphony. Formally and stylistically they seem worlds apart, though common to both is a pent-up, sinister undertow that can readily boil over into anger. For all the supreme assurance with which Walton handles his large forces, there's still a danger of those more seismic tuttis becoming unhelpfully rowdy – not in Cleveland, I should add!

**DG** Whereas the finale's portentous 'cereal' (Walton's gag) wellspring cannot not be raucous. Its subsequent cavalcade of variations, fugato and coda is here projected with total conviction. The one slightly curious dip in tension is written in. I, too, tend to think Walton had something more unbuttoned in mind for that ultimate switch to G major, but it scarcely matters in context.

**AA** The hell-for-leather pace Szell sets for the fugato has to be heard to be believed, yet amazingly there's never a hint of fluster or scramble. Kudos, too, to the Cleveland Orchestra's superb Principal Horn, Myron Bloom, in the magically hushed ninth variation earlier on (beginning at 3'39").


**DG** Spookily effective as it is, that section can make the movement yet more difficult to pace. Only under Szell we're transfixed, held in the moment rather than given leave to fret about the overall tone. On the LP as issued in the UK, more overt humour was provided by the brilliant Partita, written

expressly for the orchestra's 40th-anniversary season (1957-58), and eventually taped on January 21, 1959 (this had already appeared in the US on American Columbia's affiliate label, Epic, coupled with the *Adagio* and *Purgatorio* from Mahler's Tenth). It's a work with which lesser bands still struggle. Sir John Barbirolli made a right hash of it at the Proms and, to my ears, even Gardner fails to make it swing as it should.

**AA** Yes, Szell's Partita is an absolute knockout! It's a sparkling, brilliantly scored affair which the composer described in his programme note for the first performance as having 'no ulterior motives or meaning behind it, and makes no attempt to ponder the imponderables'. I've always liked Michael Kennedy's description of the opening 'Toccata' as 'a new etching of *Portsmouth Point*. The high-rise flats have gone up on the waterfront, the quayside tavern has a chromium-plated bar, but Scapino is a regular customer.' Szell's direction is wonderfully spry and affectionate, the playing superlative in its coordination and poise, above all in the outrageous high jinks of the 'Giga burlesca'. This breathtaking display certainly knocks spots off the composer's own Philharmonia version (1/60).

**DG** Sony Classical's Masterworks Portrait anthology (reviewed 12/91) added the US team's unbeatable account of Walton's *Hindemith* Variations. That was recorded in 1964 (and originally reviewed 7/65) with the players again clearing every hurdle with apparent nonchalance. Three classics for the price of one.

**AA** No dissent from me. They also popped up on a couple of Sony Essential Classics compilations. It's worth adding that both the Symphony and Partita have now been spruced up and are available as hi-res downloads. Or you could always go the whole hog and treat yourself to Sony Classical's lavish 'George Szell: Complete Columbia Album Collection'!

**DG** Finally, I thought we ought to acknowledge something Walton wrote to the youngish Oliver Knussen in March 1981: '... I am very happy that you should still listen to & like my 2nd Symphony, to me very surprising, since it had the worst reception from the press that any work of mine ever had, in fact if it hadn't been for the Szell recording, the work would I believe, never have been heard of again. So don't ever pay any attention to what the critics say.' 



# Books



**Nigel Simeone reads about Bernstein as a musical and political figure:**

*'Predictably, Bernstein had no time for Ronald Reagan or George HW Bush, and the disdain was mutual'*



**Edward Breen welcomes a lucid guide to Renaissance polyphony:**

*'This is the sort of book we all needed as undergraduates, a genuinely interesting but calm ordering of essential topics'*

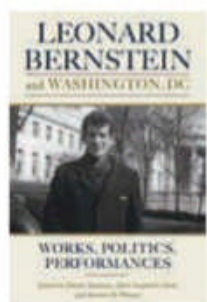
## Leonard Bernstein and Washington, DC

**Works, Politics, Performances**

**Edited by Daniel Abraham, Alicia Kopfstein-Penk and Andrew H Weaver**

University of Rochester Press, HB, 314pp, £85

ISBN 978-1-580-46973-9



Leonard Bernstein's strong connections with Boston (where he grew up and studied) and New York City

(where he lived all his adult life) have been explored in depth by his biographers. His links with Washington DC were perhaps less central to his musical career, but even so they reveal much about his political convictions and his relationships – good and bad – with those at the centre of power, as well as his entanglements with the FBI and the dark stain of McCarthyism. It was also Washington that brought into being one of his most striking creative projects, *Mass*, as well as being the first city in which *West Side Story* was staged on its way to Broadway. This fascinating collection of essays explores many aspects of Bernstein and DC. As Carol J Oja writes in her excellent introductory chapter, 'Bernstein never lived there, and he was the antithesis of a bureaucrat. Yet as one of the preeminent cultural figures of his generation, Bernstein found that the national capital offered a site to stage performances with exceptional visibility, often in support of his humanitarian convictions ... Washington, DC, highlights major themes in Bernstein's career and in his personal fusion of performance with citizenship.'

Bernstein's interaction with the presidency is documented in absorbing detail by Alicia Kopfstein-Penk in 'Bernstein and the White House'. His first correspondence with a sitting president was with Dwight D Eisenhower, and it was during Ike's tenure that Bernstein embarked on the New York Philharmonic's

trip to the Soviet Union. His friendship with the Kennedys was much closer: he was a regular visitor to the Kennedy White House, was a friend of the family, conducted a performance of Mahler's Second Symphony as a memorial to JFK in 1963 and remained close to his widow and brothers. During Lyndon Johnson's presidency, Bernstein was involved with advising on the Kennedy Center, but their relationship was respectful rather than warm. With Nixon, it was glacial: as Kopfstein-Penk puts it: 'The relationship between Bernstein and Richard Nixon grew to be mutually antagonistic, particularly as Nixon saw the pacifism of *Mass* as a plot to undermine his government. Bernstein had little connection with Gerald Ford, but with Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter there was a friendship comparable in warmth to that with the Kennedys, lasting long after Carter left the White House. Predictably, Bernstein had no time for Ronald Reagan or George HW Bush, and the disdain was mutual. In 'Bernstein and McCarthyism', Barry Seldes explores the murky workings of the FBI and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in relation to Bernstein. While Bernstein never had to testify in front of HUAC, many of his friends did. But during a period in the 1950s his 'Red' affiliations were regarded with suspicion, and the authorities refused to renew his passport.

Bernstein's role as a torchbearer for American culture is explored by Sarah Elaine Neill in 'The New York Philharmonic European Tour of 1959 and Bernstein as Eisenhower's American Cultural Ambassador'. The long preparations for this tour – especially the visit to the USSR – are documented in absorbing detail: a thoroughly worthwhile undertaking since, as Neill puts it, this tour 'still stands as one of the most successful and influential missions of cultural diplomacy'.

Part Two of the book deals with Bernstein's works performed in Washington, starting with

Elizabeth A Wells writing on the warm reception of *West Side Story* when its tryout opened in August 1957. This lucid account is followed by two chapters on *Mass*: 'Bernstein's Politics of Style: Listening for "Radical Chic" in *Mass*' by Katherine Baber, and "'Screaming Gets You Nowhere": Bernstein's *Mass* and the Politics of Peace' by Robert C Lagueux. These chapters constitute some of the best writing on this astonishing work and they are usefully complementary: the first a broad aesthetic study, the second an examination of the plethora of documentary sources for *Mass* in the Leonard Bernstein Collection at the Library of Congress. The remaining works to be considered are *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue* (Elissa Harbert), *Songfest* (Paul R Laird), *A Quiet Place* (Mari Yoshihara) and a wider study of 'Political Expression and American Identity in Bernstein's *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, *Songfest* and *Slava!* *A Political Overture*' by Lars Helgert. All are thorough, thought-provoking and valuable contributions to the Bernstein literature.

Though it's expensive, this book has much to tell us about Bernstein that isn't to be found elsewhere. Presentation throughout is scrupulously detailed, and several chapters are enhanced by facsimiles and photographs many of which will be unfamiliar. For anyone seeking to deepen their knowledge of Bernstein as both a musical and political entity, *Leonard Bernstein and Washington, DC* provides a great deal of food for thought. **Nigel Simeone**

## Renaissance Polyphony

**By Fabrice Fitch**

CUP, 292pp, HB, £69.99, PB, £23.99

ISBN 978-0-521-89933-8 (HB); 978-0-521-72817-1 (PB)



The Cambridge Introductions to Music have quickly established themselves as a bridge for





Jacqueline Kennedy, Leonard Bernstein and Shirley Bernstein during a performance of Bernstein's Theatre Songs, 1965

Tinctoris that only music composed in the last 40 years was worth hearing.

The song *L'homme armé* illustrates Fitch's detailed exposition of pitch, especially mode, returning in the climactic chapters 'Understanding musical borrowing' and 'Canons, puzzles, games'. Even by the end of the first third of this book we get to grasp what an extraordinary, complex collection of skills a musicologist needs to study Renaissance musical sources. Such skills are neatly illustrated in a short, punchy chapter 'Genre, texts, form' with an enjoyable exploration of Ockeghem's rondeaux *S'elle m'amera/Petite camusette*. Three central chapters turn to larger concepts again from Tinctoris – "Cantus magnus": music for the Mass', "Cantus mediocris": the motet' and "Cantus parvus": secular music' – and create a feeling that this book has hit a stride. I remain unconvinced, however, about the small reference to an 'affinity' between Renaissance Mass cycles and (later)

symphonies. One encounters this analogy frequently, but I still find it problematic.

The finest chapters come towards the end, especially 'Scoring, texture, scale', which draws longer-range narratives out of much of the material already covered through exploration of imitative textures and why the Eton Choirbook music is so different to Continental practice. The last chapter, 'Performance practice: a brief introduction', reminds us that in our own time we so often meet Renaissance polyphony through recordings where layers of interpretation have necessarily been added. Readers will know Fabrice Fitch not just as an academic and composer but as a regular *Gramophone* contributor and longstanding reviewer. Years of critical listening are distilled into this final chapter, making it one of the most useful and concise overviews of the topic.

To read this book you will need a firm grasp of musical chronology and either a strong familiarity with a good number of Renaissance staples or time to stop and listen several times per chapter. One thing is certain: this book is sure to convince you that the pleasurable sonic blush of a vocal ensemble in full flight is greatly enhanced by knowledge of these compositions and their extraordinary creators. **Edward Breen**

undergraduates seeking a deeper dive into essential topics. This is the eighth of nine titles on their website, and of the three I have read (the others being *Gregorian Chant* by David Hiley and *The Sonata* by Thomas Schmidt-Beste) I find the format superb: well targeted, generously detailed and unapologetically demanding. As the collection grows, I hope it will also carve out a niche with music-literate audiences. In this latest addition, *Renaissance Polyphony*, Fabrice Fitch offers a tightly focused overview with only occasional diversions into other forms of Renaissance music and 'new cultural history'. His tone is clear and concise, resisting both the overt raconteurship of authors such as Richard Taruskin and the anecdotal wit of Thomas Forrest Kelly, resulting in a crisp, fresh text and an easily navigable reference work in which his boundless enthusiasm shines bright through many well-chosen and fascinating examples. The result is the sort of book we all really needed when we were undergraduates, a genuinely interesting but calm ordering of essential topics that will spark interest in Renaissance polyphony at each turn. In fact, Renaissance music studies is now a richly represented field

and Fitch's powerful short volume will offer something unique alongside the Cambridge histories of 15th- and 16th-century music as well as Richard Freedman's *Music in the Renaissance* (Norton's Western Music in Context series) to name a few.

With Fitch's own admission that the 'focus of this book is squarely on the music' – by which he means music theory and composition techniques reaching back into medieval music – it comes as no surprise that the first few chapters are the most technical, addressing issues about the layout of manuscripts, their notation and their original uses. In particular it's a joy to explore concepts of mode, pitch, range and mensuration in such lucid, uncluttered chapters. Part of the cleverness of Fitch's plan is to bind separate topic areas through a collection of musical examples that do duty in each. For example, he takes as a starting point for Renaissance polyphony the anonymous English Mass cycles which circulated on the continent in the 1440s, *Missa Caput* especially; this introduces notions of changing vocal ranges, cantus firmus, head motifs and the appearance of the contratenor bassus. These Masses are aligned with that famous quote by



# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## Beethoven's *Missa solennis*

In his survey of Beethoven's spiritual testament on record, **Peter Quantrill** begins by listening to the brave adventurers who took up the challenge almost a century ago

‘A musical Everest’ was Colin Davis’s rueful estimation before taking up the directorship of the BBC SO in 1967, with plans to tackle Beethoven’s magnum opus. One reason the *Missa solennis* has exerted so magnetic a pull yet cast so formidable a shadow over performers and listeners alike is surely the lack of ropes for the ascent in the form of a performing heritage. The composer never supervised or attended a complete performance as he did the Ninth Symphony. Having begun work on it in 1819, to mark the forthcoming investiture of his patron Archduke Rudolf as Archbishop of Olomouc (now Olmütz) in the spring of 1820, Beethoven missed his deadline by a full three years.

In the meantime he had determined to leave not another ceremonial contribution to the liturgy on the pile of Haydn’s late Masses, his own badly received Mass in C and the sequels by Hummel, but a spiritual testament. He borrowed and studied sacred masterpieces by Palestrina, Lassus, Handel and Bach. The well-advertised first engraving was deceitfully promised by the composer to various publishers and sundry European nobility but, once acquired, there it lay gathering dust in their libraries. The 19th century may have known of the *Missa solennis* as Beethoven’s crowning masterpiece (as he saw it himself) but only by reputation.

What, beyond the notes on the stands in front of them and some experience of the Ninth Symphony, did the all-male chorus and orchestra of Orfeo Català in Barcelona have to go on when they gave three concerts in June 1927, improbably captured on 78s by the engineers of RCA Victor’s Spanish division? The technical drills and charisma of their founder-conductor Lluís Millet took them only so far – to the foothills, really,

wearing the hobnail boots of a second-hand Wagner tradition (the solo contralto Concepció Callao was a noted Ortrud and Fricka) that saw the piece through the prism of *Parsifal*.

At least the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir had been giving annual performances of the *Missa solennis* for 30 years when Polydor recorded them the following year (DG, 12/31 – nla). Did the often exciting but wayward shape of Bruno Kittel’s direction flow from an ultimately Mendelssohn-derived performing tradition handed down by his predecessor Siegfried Ochs (he of the breathtakingly fleet first chorus to the *St Matthew Passion* recorded in 1912)? Hard to say. In any case Mendelssohn probably only conducted the *Missa* in rehearsal.

Pioneering North American recordings under **Eugene Goossens** (1937) and Serge Koussevitzky (1938; Pearl, 7/97 – nla) continued like Millet to convey the thrill of discovery, loud and often hectic. Goossens at least had a cast of solo voices that would grace any of the world’s opera stages, topped by Kirsten Flagstad in her only performance of the role on disc. The first complete English recording also dates from 1937, masterminded by **Thomas Beecham**. ‘One has only to remember that Beethoven demands in the Mass a range of power from *ppp* to *ff* in order to see the utter inadequacy of a performance in which the range was from *mf* to *ff*’, wrote the critic of *The Musical Times*, present in Sheffield Town Hall, echoing complaints of listeners down the ages. Curiously he has nothing to say about the second ‘war interlude’ in the *Agnus* when the music simply falls apart for a whole minute. Up to that point, the performance is charged with the strong contrasts, the precision and tension of Beecham’s Smetana and Wagner at the Royal Opera.

For the purposes of this survey, the two wildly differing (and more generally wild) versions apparently conducted by Erich Kleiber, in Buenos Aires (1946, on Archipel) and Stockholm (1948, Music & Arts), serve principally to illustrate the exigent demands made by the *Missa* on all concerned. In a whistlestop tour of ‘firsts’, though, we reach occupied Vienna in 1940, where the long-range command of accelerating momentum in the conducting of Clemens Krauss (DG, 2/92 – nla), and the bite and pitch-control of a relatively compact, professional vocal ensemble (the choir of the State Opera rather than the amateur Singverein) go some way to meeting those demands in the multi-section panels of the *Gloria* and *Credo* as well as bestowing glowing autumnal colours and something like spiritual ecstasy upon the *Sanctus/Benedictus*.

### A QUINTET OF GIANTS

According to Neville Cardus, a message reached **Otto Klemperer** one lunchtime as he prepared to conduct the *Missa solennis*: the National Anthem would have to be played as an official prelude. In no mood to oblige, Klemperer replied, ‘Remind them that the *Missa* is a spiritual work.’

What does that entail in practice? There is no reason in theory why a performance should not grip Beethoven’s idiosyncratic deformations of sonata form in the *Gloria* and *Credo* while vividly painting the naturalistic imagery of the *Agnus Dei*; why clarity should preclude the numinous. But the *Missa solennis* is not performed in theory.

It seems fitting that Klemperer’s first address to the *Missa* in 1927 took place in St Petersburg, where Prince Galitzin (dedicatee of the late quartets) had sponsored its first complete performance at a benefit concert in April 1824. The piece





Stained with awe: part of the 'Creation' window designed near the end of his life by Marc Chagall for the Church of St Stephan in Mainz

cost the composer more time and effort than anything else he had written, and commensurate time and experience has been demanded of its greatest interpreters. Klemperer was 66 when he made his first recording, in Vienna in 1951. The bass-light recording and over-prominent soloists don't obscure the power of a then-revolutionary conception that gives singers license to phrase in single breaths rather

than effortful exclamations and (finally) marries text to music rather than carrying one on the stream of the other.

Nevertheless, rather than this, or the celebrated but more ponderous and fallible EMI recording (7/66), my choice among Klemperer accounts falls on the concert given by Cologne Radio forces in June 1955. The character of the performance is established early on by Rudolf Schock,

then reigning prince of operetta tenors. In his firm, artless articulation of the reply to the *Kyrie's* opening prayer, in the shepherd's piping of the obligato accompaniment to 'Et incarnatus' and the horn- and clarinet-led, open-air spirit of the *Benedictus*, there is an earthy spirituality that answers to the beliefs and temperament of a composer who found God in nature far more readily than in church.





Master of the subtle up-beat: Frieder Bernius conducts his Stuttgart forces in 2018 for an insightful performance (and documentary) on Naxos

And, glory be, there is counterpoint, muscular and zestful from both instruments and voices. Friedrich August Kanne was the most talented, original and alcoholic of Beethoven's friends, a former student of theology, composer of a Mass himself and editor of the influential *Wiener Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*. In 1820 he had issued a polemic against 'the present taste in music', probably timed to coincide with Beethoven's progress on the *Missa*: 'What is the greatest bulwark against the destruction of music? Counterpoint!'

In **Arturo Toscanini's** readings of the *Missa*, the virtuosity of counterpoint laid down a gauntlet to interpreters for decades to come. As the tension mounts through gathering storm clouds in the 'Dona nobis pacem', Toscanini simply will not let the dynamic rise or the singers blast, yet his pulse bears no trace of the rod. For the late John Steane, the conductor's first recording from Carnegie Hall in 1935 spoke 'with Beethoven's voice' when he chose it above all other versions in *Choral Music on Record* (CUP: 1991), and its latest and best remastering on the Immortal Performances label is dedicated to his memory. He will, I hope, forgive me for preferring the more

equally balanced BBC SO performance from the Queen's Hall in 1939, which hardly flattens out the extremes of violence and serenity germane to both the *Missa* and Toscanini's realisation but rather sharpens their outline while tightening the tempos of each movement.

In 1935 Toscanini's performers fall to their knees, as it were, for Beethoven's simple and Schütz-like setting of 'Et incarnatus', and the moment becomes a similarly withdrawn point of reverence in **Herbert von Karajan's** many live and studio recordings between 1958 and 1985. As with Toscanini, the individual make-up of the solo quartet lends distinction to the earlier versions, but the piece commands submission from all concerned – even the conductor – and here I treasure the humility, the lack of polish and the unfettered fire of that final version, made in Berlin but with Karajan's favoured Vienna Singverein chorus on their best form. An immediacy to the first word of 'Et resurrexit' suggests that the tenors have just rolled the stone away for themselves.

The theorist Donald Tovey drew on practical as well as analytical experience of the *Missa solemnis*, having conducted it

in Edinburgh in 1923, when he observed the unprecedented variety of Beethoven's response to that innocuous word 'Et' in all its iterations. With Richard Lewis's first entry for **Leonard Bernstein** in 1961 – a prayerful, almost timid plea for mercy, leading a quartet of individual worshippers between the vaulting choral pillars which mark out the sacred space – we finally encounter a performance that considers and comes to terms with every word of the text.

In crude summary: Toscanini and Karajan conduct the music, and the big concepts, and masterfully so. Klemperer and especially Bernstein get to grips with the words just as Beethoven did, and no one else would until performers learnt to live with the tools, the instrumental colours and techniques Beethoven had in mind when he wrote the *Missa*. John Corigliano's exquisite solo in the *Benedictus* is no showboating offcut from the Violin Concerto but is balanced by Bernstein and the CBS engineers to ornament and trace the chant-like monotone of choir and orchestra and the arabesques of the carefully coached vocal soloists.

## STREAMING CHOICE

Mackerras

ABC Classics (P) ➔ ABC476 3517

Even bearing Szell and Gardiner in mind,



I'm not sure any *Missa* since Toscanini has operated at such a sustained pitch of intensity. This is Beethoven banging at the gates of heaven.

## BLU-RAY CHOICE

Bernius

Naxos (P) ➔ NBD0116V

Taking the *Missa* back to church and into



the rehearsal room, the hour-long documentary, exploring the score in the affable but sharp-eared company of Bernius, affords almost as many insights as the performance.

## ANALOGUE CHOICE

Bernstein

Sony (S) (P) 19075 97048-2

Inner-voiced choral parts come searing



through the texture. Singers, players and conductor all challenge the text – both notes and words – without dissenting from each other.





Mackerras delivers intensity in Sydney in 1992

The conductor's 1979 remake (DG, 8/79) is cut from the same vividly naturalistic cloth but it falls a little more heavily around and over the piece. In the *Agnus* from 1961 I see Bernstein looking both his maker and Beethoven squarely in the face, and it is a disquieting experience. So too is the sole extant performance not merely led but fanned to an inferno by **Bruno Walter**, live in New York in 1948 – at any rate what one can make of it through wretched sound. More even than Furtwängler, who did not touch the *Missa* after 1933, the most grievous omission from the discography is a decently recorded version from Klemperer's contemporary and Mahler's friend who had studied the piece since his teenage years and esteemed it as the 'opus sanctissima'.

### BEYOND BELIEF

In October 1901 Mahler discussed the *Missa solemnis* with the 26-year-old Walter, Siegfried Lipiner and Natalie Bauer-Lechner (a fairly reliable Schindler to Mahler's Beethoven at the time). 'Probably none of you have ever really heard it,' he said, 'for the academic performances of it are singularly intolerable and if any work needs to be very freely interpreted, that one does ... Beethoven proclaimed the *Credo* in a strange way, with a sort of rage: "I believe because it's absurd to believe", whereas Bach did so quite differently, with confidence and trust.'

Even bearing in mind Mahler's own spiritual crises, his insight rings true. The *Missa solemnis* must blaze. Listening to 75-plus versions for this survey, I have reflected more than once on what Thomas Adès remarked to me about the 'holy fire' in Beethoven's symphonic writing (4/20). In two generations of post-war recordings

it ignites either fitfully (in the *Gloria* fugue, say) or not at all. Günter Wand, Carl Schuricht and William Steinberg all secure disciplined choral singing and clear textures in decent '50s mono sound but they respond to the subtly evolving tempo schemes of the *Credo* with a dry recitation of doctrine. Straight away, though, an exception must be made: for Walter Goehr and his North German Radio forces in 1958 (Vanguard – nla). More than a forerunner of the historically informed performance ideas now commonplace, Goehr's direction rages and blazes in all the right places, imparting a barely contained rapture to the end of the *Gloria* and a nicely judged, contrastingly low-key pay-off to the Herculean labours of the *Credo*'s fugue.

Beethoven builds this central panel of the Mass into a unique form bearing less resemblance to Viennese models than the suite-and-fugue constructions of the Quartets Opp 131 and 130 yet to come. This is the movement that cost him the most labour. Too slow a tempo and even professional choruses resort to shouting through the cruelly pitched outer sections. Live in 1967, George Szell (Cleveland Orchestra – nla) catches the idiom of blown-up Haydn, and the 'Et vitam venturi' fugue is painstakingly articulated with life-enhancing vigour and

Beethovenian truculence as a counterpart to the *Grosse Fuge*. Live in Berlin, on the best-recorded and integrated of his three versions, **Georg Solti** achieves similar agility but at the cost of weight of tone from his professional chorus. Among the quartet of versions led with an often grimly implacable pulse by Michael Gielen, I would be reluctant to part with the tautly suppressed expression of the 1987 performance with 'his' Baden-Baden orchestra (Intercord – nla), but he leaves the soloists to overstate their case.

Spiritual rage is off the agenda for both **Carlo Maria Giulini** and **Colin Davis**. Among the slowest on record, their *Missa* recordings treat the singers as though they had bows rather than lungs, aspiring to a generically elevated spiritual state that stretches both music and performers beyond the limits of sense and entirely misses the mark in the bellicose interventions of the *Agnus*. Moments of electrifying impact ('Qui sedes' in the *Gloria*) in more individual readings led by Jascha Horenstein (Pristine Audio, 11/04) and Constantin Silvestri (Electrecord – nla) alternate with patches where motet-like or contrapuntal writing collapses under the weight of the fervour and anachronistic gestures required to articulate the music at such ponderous tempos.

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

	RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1935	Martinelli, Rethberg, Telva, Pinza; Schola Cantorum; NYPO / <b>Toscanini</b>	Immortal Performances (M) ② IPCD1011 (7/00 <sup>R</sup> )
1937	Flagstad, Jagel, Meisle, Pinza; Cincinnati May Fest / <b>Goossens</b>	Immortal Performances (M) ③ IPCD1119
1937	Baillie, Jarred, Nash, Falkner; Leeds Fest Ch; LPO / <b>Beecham</b>	Somm (F) SOMM-BEECHAM11 (5/01)
1939	Milanov, Thorborg, Von Pataky, Moscona; BBC Chor Society & SO / <b>Toscanini</b>	Immortal Performances (M) ② IPCD1086
1948	Steber, Merriman, Hain, Alvary; Westminster Ch; NYPO / <b>Walter</b>	Music & Arts (M) ➔ CD1142
1951	Steingruber, Schürhoff, Majkut, Wiener; Vienna Academy Ch & SO / <b>Klemperer</b>	Archipon (M) ➔ ARC-WU214 (7/96 <sup>R</sup> )
1955	Stader, Radev, Dermota, Greindl; St Hedwig's Cath Ch; BPO / <b>Böhm</b>	DG (M) ② 449 737-2 (5/56 <sup>R</sup> )
1955	Kupper, Wagner, Schock, Greindl; NDR Ch; Cologne RSO / <b>Klemperer</b>	Documents (S) ④ 231730 (1/08 <sup>R</sup> )
1961	Farrell, Smith, Lewis, Borg; Westminster Ch; NYPO / <b>Bernstein</b>	Sony (S) ⑩ 19075 97048-2 (4/62 <sup>R</sup> )
1970	Giebel, Höffgen, Haefliger, Ridderbusch; Netherlands Rad Ch; RCO / <b>Jochum</b>	Philips (M) ➔ 483 2309 (10/71 <sup>R</sup> )
1974	M Price, Ludwig, Ochman, Talvela; Vienna Sym Chor; VPO / <b>Böhm</b>	DG (M) ② ➔ 469 571-2 (6/75 <sup>R</sup> )
1975	Harper, Baker, Tear, Sotin; New Philh Ch; LPO / <b>Giulini</b>	EMI/Warner (S) ② 517664-2 (7/76 <sup>R</sup> )
1977	Tomowa-Sintow, Payne, Tear, Lloyd; LSO & Chor / <b>C Davis</b>	Philips (M) ② 438 362-2PM2 (11/78 <sup>R</sup> )
1985	Cuberli, Schmidt, Cole, Van Dam; Vienna Singerein & PO / <b>Karajan</b>	DG (M) ② ➔ 445 543-2 (10/86 <sup>R</sup> )
1985	Hirsti, Watkinson, Murgatroyd, George; Oslo Cath Ch; Hanover Band / <b>Kvam</b>	Nimbus (F) NI5109 (8/88)
1989	Margiono, Robbin, Kendall, Miles; Monteverdi Ch; EBS / <b>Gardiner</b>	Archiv (F) 429 779-2AH (3/91)
1992	Mei, Lipovšek, Rolfe-Johnson, Holl; Arnold Schoenberg Ch; COE / <b>Harnoncourt</b>	Warner (S) ⑭ 2564 63779-2 (4/93 <sup>R</sup> )
1992	Illing, Campbell, Doig, Macann; Sydney Philh Chs & SO / <b>Mackerras</b>	ABC Classics (F) ➔ ABC476 3517 (4/93 <sup>R</sup> )
1994	Varady, Vermillion, Cole, Pape; Berlin Rad Chor & PO / <b>Solti</b>	Decca (M) ➔ 444 337-2DH (6/95)
2012	Schneider, Romberger, Croft, Küpfer; MDR Rad Ch; LGO / <b>Blomstedt</b>	Querstand (F) VKJK1237 (11/13)
2012	Crowe, Johnston, Gilchrist, Rose; Monteverdi Ch; ORR / <b>Gardiner</b>	SDG (F) SDG718 (2/14)
2014	Kühmeier, Kulman, Padmore, Müller-Brachmann; Bavarian Rad Ch & SO / <b>Haitink</b>	BR-Klassik (F) 900130 (8/15)
2015	Aikin, Kulman, Chum, Drole; Arnold Schoenberg Ch; CMW / <b>Harnoncourt</b>	Sony (F) 88985 31359-2 (8/16)
2016	Sampson, Kielland, Walker, Wilson-Johnson; Capella Amsterdam; Orch of the 18th Century / <b>Reuss</b>	Glossa (F) GCD921124 (6/17)
2017	Moen, Constantinescu, Gilchrist, Bevan; Bach Collegium Japan / <b>Suzuki</b>	BIS (F) BIS2321 (6/18)
2018	Winkel, Harmsen, Kohlhepp, Kataja; Stuttgart Chbr Ch & Hofkapelle / <b>Bernius</b>	Carus (F) CARUS83 501 (8/19); Naxos (F) DVD 2 110669; (F) NBD0116V



Truer to the spirit as well as the letter of the score within an oratorio mould of performance is **Eugen Jochum**. His three upper-voice soloists have form and class within the 'Romantic Bach' movement and, by complement, Karl Ridderbusch and the Concertgebouw winds bring an Amfortas-like depth of remorse to the opening of the *Agnus*. From 1955, Josef Greindl and **Karl Böhm** in Berlin attain a kind of apotheosis of Wagnerian style in the *Missa*; the conductor's 1974 Vienna recording is far more serenely sustained, a late-flowering revival of his bitter rival Krauss's assured reach for the sublime. It's the absence of struggle to get there that compromises the art-barely-concealing-art of more recent, monumental accounts by James Levine (DG, 11/92) and Christian Thielemann (C Major DVD/Blu-ray, 7/11).

So cursory a summary gives short shrift to much deep, musical thought and high-class singing. But, as Klemperer remarked to his friend Aladár Tóth after a 1957 concert in Amsterdam (also available): 'It is enormously difficult to translate into reality a work that doesn't take reality into account.'

### WINDS OF CHANGE

The Sunday solemnisation of the *Missa* was how I first heard it, at the penultimate night of the 1989 Proms, conducted by Davis (as a late replacement for the cancer-stricken John Pritchard who, like so many conductors of note, had never come to terms with the piece, and never would). Just three months later **John Eliot Gardiner** and his forces gathered in All Saints, Tooting, to make a recording that marks a new era. Singers and instrumentalists meet as equals, and not in massed, unwieldy assembly but as individual, disciplined actors, dancing through the 'Et vitam venturi' fugue like Giotto's angels.

Slower and gentler in repose than Goehr and Klemperer, Gardiner and the vibrato-less strings of the English Baroque Soloists imbue the Praeludium with exactly the kind of awestruck simplicity that Toscanini was after when he remarked to Adrian Boult: 'I close my eyes when I conduct it – I close my eyes and then the organ comes in at the end and it is a light from heaven.' The studio conditions release rather than inhibit dramatic possibilities: I love the trumpets in the first interlude of the 'Dona nobis',



Inner-voiced choral parts sear through the texture for Bernstein in 1961

first distant then bringing their message of war closer and closer, like a balefully reversed allegory of the Minister's arrival in *Fidelio*.

Gardiner's live remake tightens the screw still further. There lingered in 1989 a touch of rhythmic stiffness about the accents in the 'Crucifixus', a trace of Haydnesque convention and Anglican restraint to the opening section of the *Agnus*. In 2012 Matthew Rose (surpassing even Jochum's Ridderbusch for black despair) and the Monteverdi Choir men spear the music on the horns of its aesthetic dilemma, a Palestrina-meets-Verdi world of timeless, fathomless sorrow.

Historical serendipity made Gardiner's first recording exactly contemporary with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. Three years later, in 1992, a questing intellectual freedom coursed through a Salzburg Festival account led by **Nikolaus Harnoncourt**. As ever with Harnoncourt, the ideas come thick and fast – a hypnotically slow *Kyrie*, a 'Christe' cast in serene Mozartian church-music mode, a cool and precise first *Credo* chorus swung *à la française* in effective contrast to the crisply delivered catharsis of the 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' fugue – but the Festspielhaus acoustic is a size too capacious for his chamber orchestra and hybrid cast of operatic and Lieder-centric soloists.

Again, the 2015 remake with the Concentus Musicus Wien is another matter: more spacious and prayerful in every movement save a rethought *Kyrie*, no

less popping with originality but now integrated by both musicians and engineers into a vision that had me both checking my score every other page to see if Beethoven really wrote that – he did – and wanting to throw it aside and surrender to the moment. The plaintive first 'Et' from tenor Johannes Chum casts the mystery of the incarnation – 'et homo factus est' – in the light of an initially tentative revelation. There is nothing of Toscanini's exaltation about 'Et ascendit' but here the section has the force of a breathless, Tiresias-like recitation of offstage events, and the impact of 'judicare' is transmitted more by heavy choral accents than the often quick-and-dirty fix of a spotlight trombone entry.

If the soloists' intonation

in the *Benedictus* proves irksome, don't overlook the silkily assuaging textures of Elisabeth Kulman, Gerald Finley et al in a Concertgebouw performance filmed three years earlier (C Major, 8/13).

The very first 'period' *Missa* dates from 1977, a Collegium Aureum recording (DHM, 3/79 – sadly still not remastered for CD) conservatively paced by Wolfgang Gönnenwein in the soft-edged Berlin motet tradition and not well served by a restlessly moving sound stage and overlit timpani. The Nimbus engineering for another period pioneer, **Terje Kvam** and The Hanover Band, is more consistent but its distance only amplifies impressions of expressive reserve.

Smallest-scale of all the *Missa*'s historically informed recordings is **Masaaki Suzuki**; at times disconcertingly so. The burnished rhetoric – shaded endings, crisp sforzandos – binds the piece chronologically to the conventions of its era, while the proclamation of 'Et resurrexit' travels even further back in time, to the world of chant and the Easter Eve *Exsultet* (and why not?). Working with symphonically scaled forces in Stuttgart, Roger Norrington accommodates the pain of the 'Crucifixus' within a light-mannerist tonal world familiar from the late Masses of Schubert (Hänssler download, 3/01).

With their well-aired, wind-led instrumental textures and flowing tempos, live recordings by **Herbert Blomstedt** and **Bernard Haitink** go further still in flooding Beethoven's musical architecture with light; attractive enough on their own terms (especially Blomstedt's finely matched



team of soloists) but falling well short of the intense engagement required by the *Agnus Dei*. Over the 'Dona nobis' and its apparently docile establishment of the home key of D after the ever-darkening B minor and three-fold iterations of the *Agnus*, Beethoven inscribed 'A prayer for inner and outer peace'. We pray not for what we have but for what we and others keenly lack: this isn't a thanksgiving. The *Missa* contains multitudes, and the section is generous enough to allow for interpretations that bestow an expression of, as well as issuing an urgent plea for, peace; but the war interludes should invade that peace with more than toy soldiers.

Protestant reticence inhibits both of Philippe Herreweghe's versions, even in their beautifully sprung *Gloria* choruses, though the later one (PHI, 3/13) draws character in its later stages from an intriguingly coloured solo team. His bass soloist is David Wilson-Johnson, markedly freer in declamation under **Daniel Reuss** in a live recording with the Orchestra of the 18th Century that bears the stamp of Frans Brüggen's original, contemplative genius. Reuss inclines to Harnoncourt's latter-day way of thinking; the direction of **Frieder Bernius** hardly cedes to Gardiner in the physical edge and thrill of the quick choruses while evoking a more relaxed spirit of virtuosity in the 'Osanna'. Bernius is master of the subtle up-beat, which imparts momentum and space whatever the tempo.

**Charles Mackerras** and David Zinman bring decades of Beethovenian experience to bear on period-accented, symphony-orchestra recordings of the *Missa*. The Hill & Sons organ (setting the seal on a rapturous Praeludium), the Sydney Town Hall acoustic and athletic, full-strength Sydney Philharmonia Choirs all make significant contributions to the strength of Mackerras's performance in their own right (ABC Classics – widely available to stream); what elevates it to another level is his rapport with a top-class, Antipodean cast of soloists and the colours of the Sydney SO's playing, stained with awe and pain like a Chagall window.

Zinman's timings (Arte Nova, 7/02 – nla) may look impossibly quick in numbers but I'm rarely aware of a source of impetus that doesn't seem to arise from Beethoven and from the imperatives of the score. Very few *Agnus* recitatives in the eye of the storm are as properly *timidamente* (*ängstlich*) as this one. The *Benedictus* breathes sweet, natural air, its violin part gracefully ornamented as is Zinman's wont. The solo quartet don't sound entirely comfortable with each other but they are led by the Slovakian



Harnoncourt grasps the *Missa*'s architecture to perfection in his 2015 recording for Sony Classical

soprano Luba Orgonášová, who has been an incisive, gleaming ornament to *Missa* recordings (Davis, Harnoncourt, Gielen, Zinman, Thielemann and counting) for 30 years and more.

#### THE LANGUAGE OF RESISTANCE: COMING TO CONCLUSIONS

The *Missa solemnis* disturbed Adorno – his essay *The Alienated Magnum Opus* explains why – precisely because he understood (and rejected) the depth of the faith that underpins it. Talk of Beethoven hustling through doctrinal precepts in the *Credo* falls into the trap of agnosticising the piece and casting it in the Romantic-heroic mould of the *Eroica*. Informed perhaps both by their own complicated Judaeo-Christian beliefs and the experience of putting notes on a page, Bernstein and Klemperer knew differently, and better.

There are places (not only the angst-ridden *Agnus* but even in the apparently compliant awe of the *Kyrie*) where Beethoven, like George Herbert, strikes the board and cries 'No more'. His examination of the Mass text is undertaken in the service of professing a faith all the stronger for its self-questioning. The task required of him a synthesis of language and form – chant, *prima prattica* polyphony, *seconda prattica* motet style and Handelian fugue, his own mastery of late-Classical rhetoric, then the harmony of worlds yet to come in the late quartets – that is neither reactionary nor radical, but personal.

Composers have understood this for themselves. Bernstein's *Mass*, Mahler's Eighth, Tippett's *The Mask of Time*: these are as much interpretations of the *Missa solemnis* as any recording of Beethoven's score. The far-reaching nature of the *Missa*'s dialogue – between man and God, between past, present and future – resists formal closure, the pulling shut of a leather-bound volume effected by Giulini and others working in a post-hoc late-Romantic performing tradition for the piece. In 'The Collar', Herbert hears God's voice calling, and replies 'My Lord', with a simple brevity that Beethoven made his own.

So, in recording the piece, do Bernstein and Harnoncourt. The architecture of the *Missa solemnis* raises a sacred space, one marked out by beliefs and prayers, by creatures human and divine, as much as any monument in brick and stone. No mere devout tourists, Harnoncourt and his musicians have the measure of that space; they belong there. **G**

#### TOP CHOICE

**Harnoncourt**

Sony Classical © 88985 31359-2

In 1971 Charles Rosen wrote in *The Classical Style* about Beethoven providing 'a musical



equivalent for almost every word' of the text but it took 40 years for Harnoncourt, in his last recording, to put flesh on the bones of Rosen's words.



# ORANGES & LEMONS

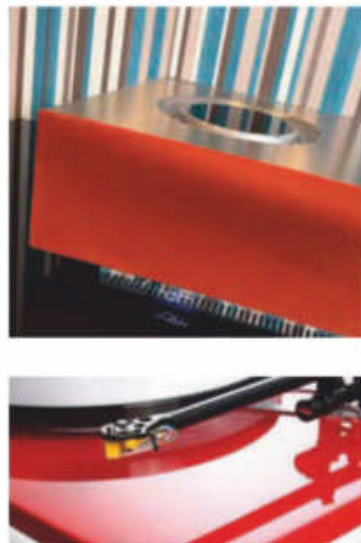
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# HIGH FIDELITY

● THE TECHNOLOGY THAT MAKES THE MOST OF YOUR MUSIC ●



THIS MONTH A Norwegian network player plus an affordable Italian alternative, and an exploration of the recent 'restomod' trend for restoring retro hi-fi.

**Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

## DECEMBER TEST DISCS



It's hard to ignore the sense of occasion in this live recording from the VPO and Valery Gergiev, beautifully captured in 96kHz/24-bit sound.



Here's an oddity: Gershwin plays his *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Marines Band of the Royal Netherlands Navy. But it works so well in DSD and DXD!

## Speakers of all shapes and kinds

From new active models to ultra-affordable options, the choice of loudspeakers keeps on growing

For a long time, British hi-fi buyers have been fortunate to have an enviable choice of keenly priced loudspeakers. Just launched is the latest version of one of the most familiar names in this sector, Wharfedale's Diamond range. The new Diamond 12 models **1**, starting from £199 a pair for the Diamond 12.0, are the result of a collaboration between the company and world-renowned speaker designer Karl-Heinz Fink. New for the Diamond 12 series is a mid/bass cone material called Klarity, combining polypropylene and mica for lightness and rigidity, and driven by a high-power motor using a voice coil wound on an epoxy/glass fibre bobbin. The driver also uses a low-damping surround for low coloration and wide dynamics, and is combined with a 25mm tweeter with a woven polyester dome. The cabinets are available in black, white, walnut and light oak. There are two more standmount models, the £249/pr 12.1 and £299/pr 12.2; the 12.3 and 12.4 floorstanders at £499/pr and £699/pr respectively; and the £229 12.C centre speaker for home cinema use.

Challenging the Diamond 12 speakers is a new range from Cambridge Audio, the SX series **2**. With prices starting at £179/pr, the speakers use a 25mm silk dome tweeter, behind which is a foam damper for enhanced sound-staging, and treated paper cone mid/bass drivers with motor systems designed for deep, fast bass while keeping the speakers easy to drive. The £179/pr SX-50 standmounter uses a 13.5cm mid/bass driver and a rear-ported cabinet, while the larger SX-60 model (£229/pr) alters the

recipe with a 16.5cm mid/bass and a front-venting port for easier placement. The SX-80 floorstanding model (£399/pr) uses two 16cm mid/bass drivers in a rear-ported cabinet, while the £149 SX-70 centre speaker has twin 10cm mid/bass drivers. Completing the range is the £199 SX-120 subwoofer, combining a 20cm long-throw bass driver with a 70W amplifier.

The new arrival from another British speaker company, Q Acoustics, takes the brand into a new arena. Its Q Active models **3** are its first active designs and connect wirelessly to a control hub allowing a wide range of connectivity and streaming options, as well as wired inputs on HDMI, optical digital and analogue (including moving magnet phono) and a subwoofer output. Chromecast streaming is built in and the system works with voice control on the Siri, Alexa and Google Assistant platforms, while a version which 'works with Alexa' is coming early in 2021. The initial speaker offering is the Q Active 200 (£1499/pr), each using two 58mm BMR drivers and a 11.4cm subwoofer, driven by three amplifiers totalling 100W, while the Q Active floorstanders, with twin subwoofers and four channels of amplification, will join the range soon. Optional Q FS75 stands are available for the Q Active 200 at £349/pr.

Another vintage design is echoed in Spendor's Classic 4/5 standmount speaker,

a development of the company's S3/5, launched in 1998 and itself based on the BBC LS3/5a, which Spendor made under licence for many years. The new Classic 4/5 **4**, which sells for £1600/pr in either cherry or walnut finish, uses a 22mm wide-surround tweeter, designed for a smooth extended response over a wider listening area, with a 15cm mid/bass driver. This uses a polymer cone, die-cast magnesium alloy chassis and new surround and suspension materials for what the company describes as 'fine articulation and a natural sense of depth and musical timing.' The cabinet uses thin low-mass side panels and a rigid front baffle, with viscoelastic damping pads to dissipate spurious energy, while the crossover is designed to make the speakers easy to drive.

Powering most speakers shouldn't be a problem for the new McIntosh MA12000 **5**, described as the most powerful integrated amplifier in its 70-year history. Selling for £16,500, the MA12000 combines a valve pre-amp, using two 12AX7As per channel, with a 350W solid-state power amp section, using the company's Autoformer technology to ensure it always delivers all its power capability, whatever the speaker load. The amplifier has 10 analogue inputs, including moving coil and moving magnet for turntables, and a digital section with seven inputs. As well as two optical and two coaxial ins, it also has the proprietary MCT connection for the company's SACD/CD transports, an HDMI for TV sound and a USB input able to support formats up to DSD512 and 384kHz/32-bit. **G**





## ● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

# Hegel H95

The new entry-level model from the Norwegian company has taken a sensible route to upgraded performance – and it pays off in excellent value for money



### HEGEL H95

**Type** Network integrated amplifier

**Price** £1500

**Output** 60W per channel (into 8 ohms)

**Analogue inputs** Two sets of line-in, with bypass option

**Digital inputs** Three optical, one coaxial, USB Type B, UPnP/internet streaming, Apple AirPlay

**Outputs** One pair of speakers, pre-outs, headphones

**Control** Remote handset £95 option, or app

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 43x10x31cm  
**hegel.com**

Tempting though it may seem to view Norwegian company Hegel Audio System as a disruptor in the hi-fi industry, with its products seemingly coming to increased prominence in recent years, the truth is that this is actually one of the better-established players in the field. With a history going back to the early 1990s, when Bent Holter started making hi-fi products based on the amplifiers he'd built for the band in which he played, Hegel – it took its name from the band – has gone far beyond the 'well-kept secret' it once was and is now distributed worldwide.

Maybe its marketing is what means it still retains an air of counterculture, quoting everything and everyone from naval adventure film *Master and Commander* to Einstein. Perhaps it's the development of its own technologies to power its products,

or it could be the simple, clean, no-frills looks. Whatever it is, there's definitely a sense of the different, of the alternative, about the Hegel range.

*Its marketing retains an air of counterculture, quoting everything and everyone from Master and Commander to Einstein*

The Einstein reference describes its latest arrival, the £1500 H95 integrated amplifier, which is now the entry-level offering in the line-up. It's based on the H90 it replaces, and in describing it the company quotes the celebrated physicist's maxim that 'the measure of intelligence is the ability to change'. True, launching a £1500 'entry-level' integrated amplifier might

in the current climate suggest Hegel also subscribes to another Einstein quote, that 'in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity', while the similarity to the outgoing H90 might recall his definition of insanity: 'doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results'. In fact, the arrival of the H95 when the H90 was already doing a fine job of attracting new buyers to the brand suggests another Einsteinism: 'Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving.'

Hegel has undoubtedly moved things on with the H95 while maintaining its tradition of making products whose apparent simplicity belies the flexibility within. At first glance this looks like a fairly minimalist amplifier, with just the two front-panel controls straddling a simple, clear display, and with just two sets of analogue inputs and four digital – one



## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

Some suggestions to make the most of the superb Hegel amplifier ...

### mCONNECT APP

The H95 works beautifully when controlled by the mConnect app – and the latest iPad is an ideal device on which to run it.



### BOWERS & WILKINS 705 SPEAKERS

The perfect complement to the slender Hegel amp: the beautifully finished Bowers & Wilkins 705 Signature speakers.



coaxial and three optical. However, there's also a USB Type B input for connection from a computer and an Ethernet port for networking, and that's where things start to get really interesting.

For while there is much that's familiar here, from network capability to the use of Hegel's in-house distortion-reducing SoundEngine2 amplification technology – features that are found across the range right up to the H590 flagship integrated – the new streaming solution here is designed to be software-upgradable, with 'over the air' internet updates promising futureproofing. In fact, this platform is carried over from the company's H120 and H190 amplifiers, both of which are more recent than the H90, and as well as adding Spotify Connect, this also brings Apple AirPlay2 compatibility and a more stable connection for UPnP streaming, and gives the amplifier the ability to 'wake up' when it detects a network signal. So even if the H95 is off, selecting it using a network service such as Spotify or AirPlay will bring it instantly to life, ready to play. In fact, the H95 has all the network features of its pricier stablemates, apart from home automation control over Ethernet and Roon-ready capability. The latter will be the greatest hitch for some potential buyers, along with the fact a remote handset is a £95 option (and is required for some of the amp's detailed set-up options), but Hegel explains candidly that it needed to make some sacrifices to hit its intended price-point.

Also carried over from the pricier models is the Hegel-developed SynchroDAC conversion, using balanced working to minimise noise, while the SoundEngine2 amplifier topology, delivering 60W per channel, is designed using local and adaptive feedforward working to tackle distortion. The design also claims a high damping factor for better speaker control: one set of speaker outputs is provided, along with variable-level pre-outs to feed a subwoofer or external power amplifier, while it's possible to customise maximum levels for both speaker and headphone outputs and adjust the inputs, including setting a home cinema bypass if required.


Control of the H95 is possible using a variety of third-party UPnP apps, with

Hegel recommending Conversdigital's mConnect player for playing music from network stores. It's free in its Lite version or \$5.99 for the full implementation, which also brings Qobuz and Tidal, provided you have the relevant subscriptions.

### PERFORMANCE

The H95 may be smaller and less expensive than its stablemates but it's by no means the poor relation. If I was expecting to have to make allowances for the relatively modest power output here – given that the top-end Hegel amps can swing four-figure wattages – I needn't have worried: not only is this little amplifier capable of a big, rich sound, with complete control even when driving big loudspeakers at high levels, it's also deft, light on its feet and capable of delivering thrilling levels of detail.

And it's as adept with delicate solo instrumental music as it is powerful and dramatic with big orchestral works. Playing Jonathan Biss's series of Beethoven piano sonatas on Orchid Classics, the Hegel gives a fine impression of the weight and resonance of the Steinway, set in a credible acoustic, focusing the attention on the performance without any sense of spotlighting or artifice. On a different scale, it delivers a captivating view of the live LSO/Rattle production of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* (10/20), delivering both the performance and a sense of the presence of an audience (if any of us can remember what that feels like!).

The UPnP streaming capability here is limited to 96kHz/24-bit, which will be no limitation for most listeners, while a connection from a computer ups that to 192kHz; but whether playing these 'hi-res' files, CD quality or streaming from online services via the app, the H95 is always entirely communicative and delivers music with both vitality and refinement. Add in the fact that this slimline – but beautifully built – amplifier will drive just about any speakers you're likely to use with electronics at this level and offers an all-in-one amplification and streaming solution, and this is not just a perfectly viable alternative to many an upmarket network system but also a conspicuously fine buy. 

## Or you could try ...

**As noted previously in these pages, the integration of network streaming into amplifiers is a growing trend. Not only does this expand the capabilities of what was once a simple hub and power source for a hi-fi set-up, it also offers the intriguing possibility of creating a 'just add speakers' system that can deliver top-notch performance without filling your room with equipment.**

### Marantz PM7000N

Selling for about two thirds of the price of



the Hegel, the Marantz PM7000N combines its manufacturer's expertise in high-quality affordable amplification with long experience in streaming products. It's compact, flexible and – thanks to the inclusion of HEOS – capable of sitting at the heart of a complete multiroom audio system. Find out more at [marantz.com](http://marantz.com).

### Arcam SA30

Arcam's SA30 sits at the top of the company's



range and combines fine amplification with the same streaming platform seen in models such as the CDS50 CD/network player. Rich and powerful, it has a smooth, easy-to-enjoy sound plus plenty of dynamic ability. For details, see [arcam.co.uk](http://arcam.co.uk).

### NAD M33

The NAD M33 is comfortably the most expensive



of these alternatives to the Hegel, but then it is a very complete high-end streaming system. It builds on the strengths of the company's Masters Series amplifiers, adds in a streaming solution complete with a large touchscreen display, and then rounds it all off with BluOS multiroom capability. Details at [nadelectronics.com](http://nadelectronics.com).



## ● REVIEW VOLUMIO PRIMO

# Entry-level alternative to DIY solutions

Compact and very affordable, this network player from Italy presents a viable option

As has been mentioned before in these pages, it's now possible to get network music player hardware in all kinds of shapes and forms, from budget buys all the way up to models the price of which would buy you a very decent car. It's even possible to build your own player, thanks to the availability of simple home-assembly computer solutions such as the Asus Tinkerboard, Raspberry Pi and a range of intel-based NUC (new unit of computing) offerings, which can be combined with software available either at very low cost or sometimes as open-source free downloads.

The Volumio Primo aims to bridge the gap between such home cobbling and fully fledged models from the well-known hi-fi names. Selling for €479 complete with free shipping from its Italian-based manufacturer, it's based on open-source software but has all the hard work done for the buyer, from the configuration of the software to the audio tuning – and, of course, due to the nature of the software, the unit can easily be updated to handle future developments.

In fact, one of the first processes to be carried out on installation of the Primo, as soon as the device is connected to the home network, is to check for any updates. In the usual manner of these things, the Primo sets up its own wireless network on first power-up, to which one can connect using a smartphone or tablet and then set it up, including connecting it to the home Wi-Fi – although wired Ethernet is preferred for the most stable connection, especially when streaming high-resolution audio.

Actually, there was another step required when installing the review sample, which had been set up running Italian as its default language, as it resisted all attempts to switch over to English. A factory reset was required, this done by downloading a file from the Volumio website to a USB stick and then restarting the player – a little fiddly, but few users will ever have to do this.

On set-up you can also use enhanced versions of the Volumio software. MyVolumio Virtuoso adds a range of extras including native Qobuz and Tidal integration, plus Bluetooth playback and – with a suitable CD drive attached – disc playback and ripping. It costs



### VOLUMIO PRIMO

**Type** Network music player

**Price** €479 (or €619 in 'Hi-Fi' form)

**Services include** UPnP network/USB playback, Qobuz, Tidal, internet radio, Bluetooth

**Analogue output** RCA

**Digital output** 192kHz/24-bit via coaxial S/PDIF; 384kHz/32-bit via USB

**Connectivity** Gigabit Ethernet, Wi-Fi, four USB Type A, HDMI for video output/touchscreen control

**Accessories supplied** Power supply, Wi-Fi antenna

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 17x4.5x12cm  
**volumio.org**

€28.99 a year, with a free trial available, or you can subscribe to MyVolumio Superstar at €66.99/yr, which also adds remote connection to up to six devices, **highresaudio.com** integration and various other niceties.

The Volumio Primo aims to bridge the gap between home cobbling and fully fledged models

An alternative is to buy the player as part of a Primo Hi-Fi package. This adds €140 to the price, making it €619, but includes lifetime Superstar level membership – usually €199 – and a number of dedicated support services. If you're going to use the Primo to the full, it seems like a good deal.

### PERFORMANCE

Not that the little Volumio Primo – built on a Asus Tinkerboard platform, it measures just 17cm wide and stands 4.5cm tall, drawing its power from an offboard supply – is at all lacking in flexibility in its 'standard' form. It will play music from network sources – both local storage and

streaming services – as well as USB storage connected to one of the four ports on the rear panel, and offers a range of outputs, both digital and analogue.

You can connect it direct to the analogue inputs of an amplifier, making use of the onboard digital-to-analogue conversion, which is handled by one of those seemingly ubiquitous ESS Sabre DACs – in this case an ES9038Q2M. Alternatively, a digital output can be fed to a suitable offboard DAC, either via a conventional coaxial connection, which will handle data at up to 192kHz/24-bit, or in up to 768kHz/32-bit and DSD512 – provided the DAC can handle it – using one of the quartet of USB ports.

There's also an HDMI output enabling the Primo's display to be seen on a screen larger than that on an app-running smartphone or tablet. If the screen in question is a suitable one, control is also possible via touch, or you can use a mouse and keyboard with the external screen. Alternatively, the Primo can be controlled via a web browser on a computer on the same network: to do this, you just have to type in **http://volumio.local** and the interface will appear.

Beyond that, there's a range of adjustments to play with, either as standard or via various plug-ins, but the beauty of this little device is that it sounds very good indeed when set up simply and plugged straight into an amplifier. It's fast and detailed, and capable of very good bass speed, even if it lacks a little extension and ultimate conviction. As a result, orchestral works can sound a shade lightweight, especially when compared with the same tracks played on more expensive network hardware – but here I'm talking about much more expensive, and the playing field can be levelled more than a little by using the Primo into a top-notch USB-capable DAC.

What's beyond doubt is the level of information this little device delivers, not just in terms of instrumental and vocal textures but also in the deep, well-focused and above all entirely realistic sound-stage pictures it can deliver, whether with a live symphony or a more intimate solo or chamber recording. It may be something of an outlier when compared with some of the better-known hi-fi names but this very capable player deserves serious investigation. **G**



# The restoration game

In the automotive world, the whole 'restomod' trend has become big business – could it be about to happen in hi-fi?

We all know how uncertain times have been of late, with many sectors seeing huge sales declines as consumers either don't go out shopping or are sitting on their money uncertain what the near future may bring. Glum faces all round, especially in the car industry, which has seen sales well down on previous years. In fact, in April this year, new car registrations were a staggering 97 per cent below the same period in 2019; and while they have recovered a bit, the overall figures for the year so far are still some 30 per cent off 2019 levels.

However, there is one sector which seems to be doing rather well: the restoration, recreation and updating of classic models from the past, combining what the industry can't help but describe as 'iconic' designs with varying degrees of modern technology to improve performance, comfort or even reliability. There's even a term for it – restomod – to describe the combination of restoration and modification, and along the way some of the desire of classic car collectors to keep vehicles as original as possible (with all the foibles that entails) has fallen by the way in the quest for greater usability.

What's more, a trend once the preserve of small specialist companies, often formed from groups of enthusiasts, is now going mainstream, with various large manufacturers jumping on the bandwagon. These days you can have anything from an original Mini to a huge 1960s Rolls-Royce available in electric form, and companies such as Jaguar Land Rover and Aston Martin have been acquiring models from their past and re-fettling them with updated technology or as 'continuation' models.

When Prince Harry drove his bride away from their wedding a couple of years back, it was in an all-electric Jaguar E-Type Concept Zero first made in 1968, with JLR saying soon after that the electrification could be applied to models built from 1948 to 1992 and assuaging the classic car lobby by explaining that the conversion was completely reversible. More recently Aston Martin announced the debut of its R-Reforgerd Vanquish 25, taking the original 2001 model and applying to it design refinements original designer Ian Callum has wanted to make since it was launched. Existing owners can have their own car

upgraded or R-Reforgerd will source a donor car, and it's yours for around £550,000, with the first 25 already on the way.

What's all this got to do with hi-fi? Well, Bang & Olufsen has started its own 'restomod' project, starting with the classic Beogram 4000, launched in the 1970s complete with linear tracking tonearm. The company has sourced 95 of the original turntables, signifying the length of time it has been in business, and subjected them to a process of restoration, re-engineering and modernisation, creating a model now known as the Beogram 4000c Recreated Limited Edition.

Working in the same facility where the turntable was originally designed and made, in the company's home town of Struer, Denmark, a team of specialist engineers disassemble these vintage turntables, inspecting and cleaning all the components and replacing parts where needed to ensure a long future of operation. That includes everything from major elements such as the drive-belt to the smallest bearing, as well as sourcing a new pickup cartridge for the turntable – for long a source of consternation to original owners, due to its unusual design.

## B&O sourced 95 turntables and subjected them to restoration, re-engineering and modernisation

For the new cartridge, B&O turned to Soundsmith, based in Peekskill on the banks of the Hudson north of New York. As well as servicing a wide range of hi-fi products, the company – led by founder, president and chief engineer Peter Ledermann – took up the slack when the Danish company stopped making cartridges back in 1986. Under license, Ledermann reverse-engineered the cartridges, recreating the tooling and skills to manufacture them, and in the process his company became the only manufacturing centre for all B&O cartridges. The 4000c Recreated Limited Edition comes fitted with an SMMC20CL cartridge, one of Soundsmith's most popular models, which uses a Nude Contact Line Diamond stylus mounted on a solid sapphire cantilever.

The turntables are of course extensively tested and tuned for optimal performance,



Danish design: B&O's restored Beogram

but that's only part of the story – after all, it's not unknown for manufacturers to offer servicing to this standard. My own Naim pre-amp and power amp, now getting on for 30 years old, had new life breathed into them by a complete factory service, while Quad, though now manufacturing in China, has long had a reputation for the ability of its Huntingdon service department to tackle equipment of any vintage.

However, B&O has gone further with the Recreated turntable, taking it beyond restoration and into restomod territory. The aluminium is polished and anodised in a warmer 'champagne' gold tone, using the resources of its massive in-house anodising and metal-finishing plant in Struer, there's a new finish on the touch-panel controls, there's a new hand-crafted wooden frame to the turntable and the lid is new, too – all to make it more suited to modern decor without losing the classic look. Then, making use of space left by the original designers for future additions, the engineers have added an onboard phono stage, allowing the turntable to be connected to any amplifier – or indeed straight into all the company's current speakers, either directly or via the wireless Beosound Core.

Completing the package is a fitted solid oak box with aluminium detailing, stylus and record brushes in a leather pouch, a reprint of the Beogram 4002 Design Story and a £9000 price tag. But I shouldn't worry about that last detail too much: the 95 turntables went on sale in mid-October and I'm sure they've all been long ago snapped up, leaving us only to see where the company next turns the attention of its Classics initiative. **G**



# NOTES & LETTERS

Write to us at St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or [gramophone@markallengroup.com](mailto:gramophone@markallengroup.com); email is preferable at this time

## Our Beethoven

Lord King's 'My Beethoven' article (Awards issue, page 138) chimed with me on two significant points.

I feel his dismay at not being selected for the musical 'sheep', but consigned to the 'goats', on entry to his grammar school. That experience seems as traumatic for him as my own from one music lesson during the 1960s at my grammar school. As was quite normal, the whole class of about 30 was singing to the accompaniment of our music teacher at the piano. On this occasion we had with us a visiting assessor who prowled back and forth in front of the rows of singing voices. Stopping and pointing directly at me, he pronounced: 'You're singing flat!' I have, ever after, self-consciously refrained from singing as far as I possibly can! There were, fortunately, other influences more benign than school music lessons, that led me to both jazz and to classical music, and eventually to be Chair of a local promoting concert society.

More happily than that event, I share with Lord King an appreciation of the Carlos Kleiber recording of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. I acquired my recording, alongside the Fifth recorded in 1975, in the same CD reissue pictured in the article. I had encountered that version of the Fifth on BBC Radio 3. With the hair on the back of my neck still rigidly standing out, I rushed out to buy the disc and have treasured both remarkable recordings ever since.

Stephen Huyshe-Shires  
Sidbury, Sidmouth, Devon

## Remembering Margaret Price

While I am grateful to Richard Fairman for his tribute to Dame Margaret (Awards issue, page 74), I was a little surprised that he made no mention of the audition she had with the great Otto Klemperer who was so impressed with her voice that he insisted she should take the part of Fiordiligi on his EMI recording of *Così fan tutte*, despite the fact that Walter Legge had engaged another singer.

The major part of her career took place outside the UK, particularly in Munich over many years, but it has always remained a mystery that her unique vocal qualities were not more widely appreciated in the UK itself despite being a first choice for conductors as diverse as Muti, Carlos Kleiber and Abbado, though

## Letter of the Month

### When Sir John Barbirolli went to Texas

John Perry's letter (October, page 109) reminded me of the time Barbirolli conducted the Houston Symphony on tour and played in a gymnasium at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, with the audience facing the musicians on bleachers, in about 1966. I was an undergraduate there at the time. The heat was awful, and we were fanning ourselves with the broad white programmes we were given. After the first number, Sir John turned to the audience and asked that we not do that. The bleachers were so close to the orchestra that he was distracted by the waving programmes in his peripheral vision. We complied, of course, despite the heat! They played Sibelius's 'Lemminkäinen's Return', Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, Griffes's *The White Peacock*, and the Vaughan Williams *London Symphony*. A night never to be forgotten! A couple of years later, I attended a concert at Jones Hall, in Houston, where Sir John conducted the



Lasting memories: Barbirolli in the 1960s

Houston Symphony in Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* and *Symphonie fantastique* on the maestro's birthday. Those were the only two times I ever saw him conduct live.

Thank you, Sir John!

David Hooker  
Beaumont, TX, USA

## RAYMOND WEIL GENEVE

RAYMOND WEIL are a Swiss luxury watch brand inspired by horology, music and family.

This *toccata* classic wristwatch features a sleek stainless steel 39mm case, Swiss quartz movement, sophisticated Roman numeral dial with a date window at 3 o'clock and complemented by a black leather strap with alligator finish.

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she was used extensively for recordings by Sir Colin Davis, Sir Adrian Boult and Sir Charles Mackerras. The performances of *Norma* to which Richard Fairman refers were a belated attempt by the Royal Opera House to give her due recognition after previous neglect.

Many readers will be familiar with the story of Dame Margaret being approached at short notice by Claudio Abbado in 1981 to sing the mezzo part in a performance of the Verdi Requiem when the scheduled singer fell ill. This performance was broadcast by Capital Radio and I've always wondered why some enterprising record company did not release the recording to allow us to hear Dame Margaret, who actually started

her singing career as a mezzo, singing alongside Mirella Freni (another soprano of choice for Abbado).

As well as her prowess as a Lieder singer of the first rank to which Richard Fairman refers, she was also an outstanding concert singer, as can be heard in her various recordings of Beethoven's *Missa solennis*, Handel's *Messiah*, Elgar's *The Kingdom* and Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony*.

Hers was an exceptional and unique voice, and it is to be hoped that the Orfeo label may give us other examples of roles which she might have sung at the Royal Opera House.

Gordon Armour  
Greenock, Renfrewshire



# OBITUARIES

## ROBERT LAYTON

*Musicologist, critic and radio producer*

*Born May 2, 1930*

*Died November 9, 2020*



Robert Layton, the last surviving member of the triumvirate (all *Gramophone* reviewers) behind the Penguin Guide, has died at the age of 90. Alongside Edward

Greenfield and Ivan March, Layton guided a couple of generations towards the finest classical recordings available, especially championing the music of Northern Europe. He was an urbane, civilised man whose wry wit and dry sense of humour was always a delight.

Layton read music at Oxford with Edmund Rubbra and Egon Wellesz, then, on a Swedish government scholarship, studied languages at the universities of Uppsala and Stockholm. In 1959, after three years of teaching, he joined the BBC, progressing through presentation to senior producer at Radio 3 where, among other things, he produced the lunchtime concerts from St John's Smith Square. He also oversaw 'Interpretations on Record', a series fondly remembered by record buffs.

Among his specialities were Sibelius, Grieg, Nielsen and Franz Berwald, whose music he championed both in his work at Radio 3 and in print. Among his many books were his Master Musicians *Sibelius* (1978), the two excellent guides he edited – *A Companion to the Symphony* (1993) and *A Companion to the Concerto* (1988) – and his translations of Erik Tawaststjerna's three-volume *Sibelius*. He was awarded the Sibelius medal and became a Knight of the Order of the White Rose of Finland.

He reviewed for *Gramophone* from 1965, and contributed a 'Quarterly Retrospect' round-up which revisited recent releases following their initial review. From 1971, he also contributed to 'Sounds in Retrospect', a quarterly feature focusing on recorded sound.

Famously, he was the author of prank during the preparation of the 1980 edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. He concocted an entry for an imaginary Danish composer, Dag Henrik Esrum-Hellerup (the surname actually comprising two stations on the railway line north of Copenhagen). Unfortunately, the Editor of *Grove*, Stanley Sadie, failed to see the joke.

## ALEXANDER VEDERNIKOV

*Conductor*

*Born January 11, 1964*

*Died October 29, 2020*



The conductor Alexander Vedernikov has died of Covid-19; he was 56. At the time of his death he was Chief Conductor of the Royal Danish Opera

and Musical Director of St Petersburg's Mikhailovsky Theatre. His father was another Alexander, a noted operatic bass singer and celebrated Boris Godunov; his mother is Natalia Gureyeva, a professor of organ at the Moscow Conservatory.

He studied at the Moscow Conservatory and, from 1988 to 1990, he worked at Moscow's Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theatre. From 1988 to 1995, he was assistant to the chief conductor and second conductor of the Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra (formerly Gosteleradio's Bolshoi Symphony Orchestra), and in 1995, he founded the Russian Philharmonia Symphony Orchestra; he was Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of this orchestra until 2004.

From 2001 to 2009 he was Music Director and Chief Conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre, a tenure that is hailed for its renewing of the Bolshoi Theatre's long reputation for artistic excellence. From 2009 to 2018 he was Chief Conductor of Denmark's Odense Symphony Orchestra.

A much sought-after guest conductor, he worked with many of the world's major orchestras and in all the leading operas houses. In 2018, he conducted the BBC SO at the Proms in the world premiere of Joby Talbot's guitar concerto, *Ink Dark Moon*, with Miloš as soloist.

On record he can be heard in two recordings of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto (partnering Dong Hyek Lim with the BBC SO for Warner Classics, and Alexandre Tharaud with the RLPO for Erato). He also conducts the Bolshoi company in the much-talked-about production by Dmitri Tcherniakov of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* (Bel Air Classiques). With the Odense SO for the Cedille label, he conducts Tchaikovsky's complete *concertante* works for violin with Jennifer Koh.

**NEXT MONTH**  
**JANUARY 2021**



## Nézet-Séguin records Rachmaninov

Our Orchestra of the Year's Music Director on his new recorded Rachmaninov cycle, to include the work premiered exactly 80 years ago by his Philadelphia musicians

## Howard Shelley at 70

Marking a milestone birthday, this marvellous British musician talks to Jeremy Nicholas about coming plans – not least his latest recording as part of Hyperion's groundbreaking Romantic Piano Concerto series

## Eugene Onegin

Mark Pullinger picks his top version of this most performed (and recorded) of Russian operas

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# NEW RELEASES INDEX

The latest releases on CD, SACD, DVD, Blu-ray and download

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## CD & SACD

**7 MOUNTAIN** *7mntn.com*  
**Various Cpsrs** Regards sur l'infini – Songs. *Dain/Armstrong, S.* ⑆ **7MNTN024**

**ABC CLASSICS** *abc.net.au*  
**Brahms** Syms Nos 3 & 4. *Australian CO/Tognetti.* ⑆ **ABC481 9892**  
**Farrenc. Saint-Saëns** Pf Qnts. *Ironwood.* ⑆ **ABC481 9887**  
**Tawadros** Oud Conc. *Tawadros/Sydney SO/Northey.* ⑆ **ABC481 9241**

**ACCENT**  
**Telemann** Cantatas. *Mields/Temmingh.* ⑆ **ACC24371**  
**Werner** Gute Hirt. *Purcell Ch/Orfeo Orch/Vashegyi.* ⑓ ② **ACC26502**

**AEOLUS** *aeolus-music.com*  
**Bach, JS** Hpd Concs, Vol 4. *Sols/Helsinki Baroque Orch/Häkkinen.* ⑆ **AE10107**

**ALPHA** *outhere-music.com/alpha*  
**Beethoven** Pf Conc No 3. Triple Conc. *Helmchen/Weithaas/Hecker/DSO Berlin/Manze.* ⑆ **ALPHA642**  
**Beethoven. Rihm. Schubert** Vanitas – Songs. *Nigl/Pashchenko.* ⑆ **ALPHA646**

**Tchaikovsky** Sym No 5. Francesca da Rimini. *Tonhalle Orch, Zurich/Järvi, P.* ⑆ **ALPHA659**  
**Various Cpsrs** 'Dear Mademoiselle': A Tribute to Nadia Boulanger. *Siranossian/Gouin/Barenboim.* ⑆ **ALPHA635**  
**Various Cpsrs** Mozart y Mambo. *Willis.* ⑆ ② 📀 **ALPHA730A**

**AMBRONAY** *ambronay.org*  
**Various Cpsrs** Transilvano: Musical Bridges Between Italy & Hungary Around 1600. *Prisma.* ⑆ **AMY312**

**ANALEKTA** *analekta.com*  
**Beethoven** Vn Sons Nos 1-3 & 5. *Wan/Richard-Hamelin.* ⑆ **AN2 8795**

**Bernstein. Ginastera. Moussa** Wks for Vn & Orch. *Wan/Montreal SO/Nagano.* ⑆ **AN2 8920**  
**Harnoy** On the Rock. *Harnoy.* ⑆ **AN2 8909**  
**Schubert** Cpte Sons, Vol 3. *Gaudet.* ⑆ **AN2 9183**  
**Vivaldi** Luce e ombra. *Leblanc/Ens Mirabilia.* ⑆ **AN2 9137**

**APARTÉ** *apartemus.com*  
**Various Cpsrs** In Paradisum. *Schola Cantorum of the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School/Price/Evans.* ⑆ **AP228**

**ARCANA** *outhere-music.com/en/labels/arcana*  
**Tartini** Concerti e sonate per Vc picc. *Brunello/Accademia dell'Annunciata/Doni.* ⑆ **A478**  
**Various Cpsrs** Pulchra es: Affetti in 17th-Century Italian Inst Wks. *Ricercar Continuo.* ⑆ **A118**

**ARS PRODUKTION** *ars-produktion.de*  
**Gebirtig** Nu Gey – Ikh Bleyb: Yiddish Songs. *Schaechter/Von Götz.* ⑆ **ARS38 578**  
**Mahler** Sym No 2 (r1991). *Verebics/Horne/Berlin Rad Ch/Kassel Fest Orch/Fischer, A.* ⑆ 📀 **ARS38 304**  
**Various Cpsrs** Edgar Allan Poe & die Harfe. *Wacker.* ⑆ **ARS38 576**

**Various Cpsrs** Pregón del cantante vagabundo. *Ens Ad Fontes.* ⑆ **ARS38 574**

**AUDAX** *audax-records.fr*  
**Various Cpsrs** Berlin Album. *Ens Diderot/Pramsohler.* ⑆ **ADX13726**

**AUDITE** *audite.de*  
**Beethoven** Cpte Wks for Pf Trio, Vol 6. *Swiss Pf Trio.* ⑆ **AUDITE97 771**  
**Various Cpsrs** Pennies from Heaven – Encores. *Mandelring Qt.* ⑆ **AUDITE97 786**

**BERLIN CLASSICS** *edel.com*  
**Chausson** Pf Qt **Ravel** Pf Trio. *Huangci/Trio Macchiavelli.* ⑆ **O301417BC**  
**Fauré** Pf Qts. *Fauré Qt.* ⑆ **O301422BC**  
**Vierne. Widor** Org Wks. *Apkalna.* ⑆ **O301421BC**  
**Various Cpsrs** Hausmusik. *Ceays.* ⑆ **O301398NM**; ⑆ ② 📀 **O301399NM**

**Various Cpsrs** Legendary Eterna Recs. *Staatskapelle Berlin/Herbig/Suitner.* ⑤ ⑤ 📀 **O301606BC**  
**Various Cpsrs** Tpt Wks. *Höfs.* ⑆ **O301600BC**

**BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER** *berliner-philharmoniker-recordings.com*  
**Various Cpsrs** Orch Wks (pp2018-20). *BPO/Petrenko, K.* ⑓ ⑦ ⑤ + ② 📀 **BPHR200351**

**BIRMINGHAM RECORD COMPANY** *birminghamrecordcompany.wordpress.com*  
**Cutler** Hawaii Hawaii Hawaii. *Clowes/Ereprijs Orch/Boerman/BBC Concert Orch/Palmer.* ⑆ **BRC010**

**BIS** *bis.se*  
**Bartók** Solo Vn Son **Martinů** Vn Concs. *Zimmermann, FP/Bamberg SO/Hrůša.* ⑆ 📀 **BIS2457**  
**Mozart** Cpte Pf Concs. *Brautigam/Cologne Academy/Willens.* ② ⑫ 📀 📀 **BIS2544**

**Mozart** Gran Partita. *Members of the RCO/Ogrintchouk.* ⑆ 📀 **BIS2463**  
**Simaku** con-ri-sonanza – Wks for Pf & Stg Qt. *Houston/Diotima Qt.* ⑆ 📀 **BIS2449**  
**Various Cpsrs** In Motion. *United Stgs of Europe.* ⑆ 📀 **BIS2529**

**BMOP/SOUND** *bmop.org*  
**Harbison** Concs for Stg Insts. *Sols/Boston Modern Orch Project/Rose.* ⑆ 📀 **1074**

**B RECORDS** *b-records.fr*  
**Brahms** Pf Trios. *Fouchenneret/Salque/Le Sage.* ⑆ ② **LBM029**

**BRIDGE** *bridgerecords.com*  
**Brahms** Pf Pieces, Opp 117-119. *Rosenbaum.* ⑆ **BRIDGE9545**  
**Karchin** Five Compositions (2009-2019). *Various artists.* ⑆ **BRIDGE9543**

**Various Cpsrs** Bestiary on Ivory: Wks from the Animal Kingdom. *Tu.* ⑆ **BRIDGE9544**  
**Various Cpsrs** English Songs à la française. *Duncan/Switzer.* ⑆ **BRIDGE9537**

**BRILLIANT CLASSICS** *brilliantclassics.com*  
**Beethoven** CI Trios. *Trio Origo.* ② **96215**  
**Britten. Debussy. Poulenc** Concs for Two Pfs. *Armellini/Ometto/Orch di Padova e del Veneto/Piovano.* ② **96163**  
**Castelnuovo-Tedesco** Chbr Wks. *Ens Italiano.* ② **96007**  
**Janitsch** Trio Sons. *Berlin Friday Academy.* ② **95977**  
**Petrali** Org Wks. *Bottini.* ⑤ ② **95613**  
**Vierne** Cpte Org Syms. *Boerema.* ⑤ ③ **96226**  
**Various Cpsrs** American Wks for Gtr & Pf. *Cardi/Pieranunzi.* ② **96089**

**Various Cpsrs** Cpte Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. *Belder.* ⑤ ⑫ **95915**  
**Various Cpsrs** Foolish Heart: Madrigals for Three Sops. *Galàn.* ② **95995**

**Various Cpsrs** Makaberer Zirkus. *Marcello Nisinman Trio.* ② **96088**

**Various Cpsrs** Music for Francesco II d'Este. *Pezzi/Agati/Modena Barocca/Paganelli.* ② **96236**  
**Various Cpsrs** Orch Favourites. *RPO.* ⑤ ④ **96146**

**CANTALOUPE** *cantaloupemusic.com*  
**King, K** Modern Yesterdays. *King, K.* ⑆ **CA21162**

**CARUS** *carus-verlag.com*  
**Cherubini** Messe solennelle. *Sols/Stuttgart Chbr Ch/Klassische Philh, Stuttgart/Bernius.* ⑆ **CARUS83 512**  
**Various Cpsrs** White Christmas. *Calmus Ens.* ⑆ **CARUS83 511**

**CHRISTOPHORUS** *christophorus-records.de*  
**Offele** Ecce advenit. *Münstermusik Konstanz/Schreyer.* ⑓ ② **CHR77446**

**Various Cpsrs** Christmas Concs from Leipzig. *Arpa Festante/Gartner.* ⑆ **CHR77448**  
**Various Cpsrs** Christmas Wks at St Thomas's, Leipzig. *Bad Homburg Chbr Ch/Johann Rosenmüller Ens.* ⑆ **CHR77449**

**CLAUDIO** *claudiorecords.com*  
**Bach, JS** Solo Vc Stes. *Saram.* ⑆ ② **CR5995-2**; ⑆ 📀 **CR5995-6**

**CONVIVIUM** *conviviumrecords.co.uk*  
**Various Cpsrs** Over the Rainbow: Songs & Duets. *James, W & K/Archer.* ⑆ **CR059**

**COVIELLO** *covielloclassics.de*  
**Schumann** Syms Nos 1 & 3. *Cappella Aquileia/Bosch.* ⑆ 📀 **COV92015**

**Various Cpsrs** Affetti musicali: Venetian Wks of the Seicento. *Ens Colorito.* ⑆ **COV92013**  
**Various Cpsrs** English Connection. *Argovia PO/Bostock.* ⑆ **COV92017**

**CPO** *jpc.de/jpcng/cpo/home*  
**Elgar. Jacob. Parry** English Wks for Stgs. *SW German CO, Pforzheim/Bostock.* ⑆ **CPO555 382-2**  
**Handel** Cpte Pf Concs. *Kirschnereit/Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss/Larsen.* ⑓ ③ 📀 **CPO555 413-2**  
**Jeral. Kienzl. Lazzari** Pf Trios. *Thomas Christian Ens.* ⑆ ② **CPO777 761-2**

**Krieger** Trio Sons, Op 2. *Echo du Danube/Zincke.* ⑆ ② **CPO555 333-2**

**Marx, AB Mose.** *Sols/Leipzig Gewandhaus Ch/Camerata Lipsiensis/Meyer.* ⑆ ② **CPO555 145-2**  
**Platti** Hpd Concs. Vn Conc. *Loreggian/Arte dell'Arco/Guglielmo.* ⑆ **CPO555 219-2**

**Telemann** Ov Stes. *Orfeo Baroque Orch/Heerden.* ⑆ **CPO555 389-2**

**DACAPO** *dacapo-records.dk*  
**Buchanan** On Rosenhill. *Buchanan/Aarhus Jazz Orch/Seyer-Hansen.* ⑆ **8 226139**  
**Various Cpsrs** Romance – Danish Wks for Vn & Orch. *Åstrand/Turku PO/Iisakkila.* ⑆ 📀 **6 220652**

**DANACORD** *danacord.dk*  
**Various Cpsrs** Legacy, Vol 3 (bp/pp1950-57). *Grøndahl.* ② ② 📀 **DACOC883**

**DELOS** *delosmusic.com*  
**Galante. Paulus** So Hallow'd the Time – Christmas Wks. *Taylor Fest Ch/Taylor.* ⑆ **DE3580**

**DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON** *deutschegrammophon.com*  
**Various Cpsrs** Art of the Mandolin. *Avital.* ⑆ **483 8534**

**DOREMI** *doremi.com*  
**Various Cpsrs** Live!, Vol 1 – Wks for Vn & Orch (pp1950-69). *Stern.* ⑓ ② 📀 **DHR8116/17**  
**Various Cpsrs** Live!, Vol 2 (pp1953-68). *Stern/Bernstein.* ⑓ ② 📀 **DHR8128/9**

**DREYER GAIDO**  
**Various Cpsrs** Risplendenti, riversi. *Mirković/Godard.* ⑆ **DGCD21127**

**ECM NEW SERIES** *ecmrecords.com*  
**Mansurian** Con anima. *Pogossian/Kashkashian.* ⑆ **481 9522**  
**Tüür** Lost Prayers. *Tetzlaff, T.* ⑆ **481 9540**  
**Various Cpsrs** Budapest Concert (pp2016). *Jarrett.* ⑆ ② **073 0194**; ⑆ ② 📀 **073 9330**

**Various Cpsrs** Lontano. *Lechner/Couturier.* ⑆ **085 7705**

**ELOQUENCE** *eloquenceclassics.com*  
**Various Cpsrs** Decca Legacy. *Haendel.* ⑤ ⑥ 📀 **ELQ484 1688**  
**Various Cpsrs** Icon: The American Decca Recs. *Boulanger.* ② ⑤ 📀 **ELQ484 1384**

**Various Cpsrs** My Favourites. *Sutherland.* ⑓ 📀 **ELQ482 6448**

**EM RECORDS** *em-records.com*  
**Holst** Alpha & Omega. *Godwine Ch.* ⑆ **EMRCD062**  
**Various Cpsrs** Dicky Bird Hop – Pf Wks. *Guinery.* ⑆ **EMRCD064**  
**Various Cpsrs** Harpscenec. *Lewis.* ⑆ **EMRCD063**

**ENSEMBLE MODERN** *ensemble-modern.com*  
**Dusapin** Passion. *Motseri/Nigl/Vocalconsort Berlin/Ens Modern/Ollu.* ⑆ **EMCDO47**

**ETCETERA** *etcetera-records.com*  
**Croes. Godecharle. Maldere** Trio Sons. *Project Bousou.* ⑆ **KTC1679**

**Kox** Chbr Wks at Orlando (pp2019). *Various artists.* ② ② **KTC1687**

**FIRST HAND** *firsthandrecords.com*  
**Various Cpsrs** Mirrors: 21st Century American Pf Trios. *Lysander Pf Trio.* ⑆ **FHR111**

**A FLOCK ASCENDING** *aflockascending.com*  
**Stewart, M** Beyond Time & Space (in memoriam John Tavener) **Tavener** Palintropos. *Aruhi/New London Orch/Corp.* ⑆ **AFACD001**

**FRA BERNARDO**  
**Matteis** Silk & Tweed. *Skuplik/Arend.* ⑆ **FB2085199**  
**Visée** Lute Wks. *Ötzbrugger.* ⑆ **FB2092112**

**FRYDERYK CHOPIN INSTITUTE** *nifc.pl*  
**Chopin** Pf Concs. *Kenner/Apollon Musagète Qt.* ⑆ **NIFCCD220**  
**Dobrzyński** Pf Conc. *Giusiano/Sinf Varsovia/Shelley.* ⑆ **NIFCCD108**

**FUGA LIBERA** *outhere-music.com/fugalibera*  
**Mozart** Double Concs. *Sols/Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel/Biel Solothurn SO/Zehnder.* ⑆ **FUG766**



<b>GEGA NEW</b>	<i>english.geganew.com</i>
<b>Goleminov</b> Stg Qt No 4 <b>Shostakovich</b> Stg Qt No 8. Pf Qnt. <i>Chouchkov/Sofia Qt of Bulgarian Rad.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>GD420</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Famous Op Voices of Bulgaria (r1957-82). <i>Nikolov.</i> <span>🇫</span> <span>📀</span> <b>GD414</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Intermissions – Pf Wks. <i>Ivanov.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>GD419</b>	
<b>GLOSSA</b>	<i>glossamusic.com</i>
<b>Boismortier</b> Voyages de l'Amour. <i>Purcell Ch/Orfeo Orch/Vashegyi.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>GCD924009</b>	
<b>Josquin</b> Stabat mater. <i>Cantica Symphonia.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>GCDP31909</b>	
<b>Vivaldi</b> Lost Concs for Anna Maria. <i>Guglielmo/Loreggian/Modo Antiquo/Sardelli.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>GCD924601</b>	
<b>Weber</b> Cl Concs. <i>Hoeprich/Orch of the Eighteenth Century/van Waas.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>GCD921128</b>	
<b>GOD RECORDS</b>	<i>godrec.com</i>
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Symposium. <i>Lésions Graves.</i> <span>🇫</span> <span>📀</span> <b>GOD59</b>	
<b>GRAMOLA</b>	<i>gramola.at</i>
<b>Beethoven</b> . <b>Eliasson</b> . <b>Handel</b> Hammerklavier Live. <i>Levin, B.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>98011</b>	
<b>Berg</b> . <b>Janáček</b> . <b>Medtner</b> Pf Sons. <i>Karajeva.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>99227</b>	
<b>Bruckner</b> Letters, Vol 2. <i>Böck.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>99237</b>	
<b>Kancheli</b> Poetry of Silence. <i>Sepashvili/Karbeli/Kharshiladze.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>99235</b>	
<b>GUILD</b>	<i>guildmusic.com</i>
<b>Beethoven</b> Sym No 5. Orch Wks. <i>National SO/Sushanskaya.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>GMCD7826</b>	
<b>HÄNSSLER CLASSIC</b>	<i>haenssler-classic.de</i>
<b>Handel</b> Sacred Wks. <i>Various artists.</i> <span>🇸</span> <span>🇩</span> <span>📀</span> <b>HC20049</b>	
<b>Schumann</b> Cpte Pf Wks, Vol 14: Variations. <i>Uhlig.</i> <span>🇫</span> <span>📀</span> <b>HC17040</b>	
<b>Shostakovich</b> Vn Sons. <i>Hertenstein/Kim.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HC20011</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Pan+Apoll: Water Music for Fl & Hp. <i>Schreiber/Velkaverh.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HC20041</b>	
<b>HARMONIA MUNDI</b>	<i>harmoniamundi.com</i>
<b>Bartók</b> Stg Qts Nos 1, 3 & 5. <i>Jerusalem Qt.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HMM90 2240</b>	
<b>Beethoven</b> Pf Sons Nos 28, 30 & 32. <i>Lugansky.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HMM90 2441</b>	
<b>Charpentier</b> Messe à quatre chœurs. <i>Correspondances/Daucé.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HMM90 2640</b>	
<b>Chopin</b> Cpte Waltzes (r2005). <i>Tharaud.</i> <span>🇫</span> <span>📀</span> <b>HMM93 1927</b>	
<b>Piazzolla</b> Nuevo Tango!. <i>Various artists.</i> <span>🇸</span> <span>📀</span> <span>📀</span> <b>HMX290 8960/62</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Mad Lover – Wks for Vn & Lute. <i>Langlois de Swarte/Dunford.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HMM90 2305</b>	
<b>HEVHETIA</b>	<i>hevhetia.com</i>
<b>Anonymous</b> Verbum bonum – Gregorian Chant. <i>Schola Minor/Urdová.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HVO199-2-331</b>	
<b>HOXA</b>	<i>hoxa.net</i>
<b>Koechlin</b> Chants de nectaire – Fl Wks. <i>Woodward.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HS190207</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Festive Brass. <i>Bristol Brass Consort.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HS191207</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Gaudetel: Carols & Org Wks. <i>Clifton Cath Ch/Ball/Ogden/Snelson.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HS970802</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Music for Christmas. <i>Clifton Cath Ch/Walker/Gibbons.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>HS071027</b>	
<b>KAIROS</b>	<i>kairos-music.com</i>
<b>Nono</b> Lontananza nostalgica utopica futura. <i>Fusi/Billone.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>KAIO015086</b>	
<b>LAWO</b>	<i>lawo.no</i>
<b>Myaskovsky</b> Sym No 21 <b>Prokofiev</b> Sym No 5. <i>Oslo PO/Petrenko, V.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>LWC1207</b>	
<b>LINN</b>	<i>linnrecords.com</i>
<b>Mozart</b> Late Syms. Requiem. <i>SCO/Mackerras.</i> <span>🇸</span> <span>📀</span> <span>📀</span> <b>CKD651</b>	
<b>Wilson, T</b> Syms Nos 2 & 5. <i>RSNO/Macdonald.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>CKD643</b>	
<b>LPO</b>	<i>lpo.co.uk</i>
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Musical Legacy. <i>Boult.</i> <span>🇩</span> <span>📀</span> <span>📀</span> <span>📀</span> <b>LPO0119</b>	
<b>MIRARE</b>	<i>mirare.fr</i>
<b>Arensky</b> . <b>Mendelssohn</b> . <b>Shostakovich</b> Pf Trios. <i>Trio Zeliha.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>MIR522</b>	
<b>Boccherini</b> Une nuit à Madrid. <i>Ombres.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>MIR524</b>	
<b>Handel</b> Hpd Stes. <i>Hantai.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>MIR480</b>	
<b>MSR CLASSICS</b>	<i>msrcd.com</i>
<b>Prokofiev</b> . <b>Rachmaninov</b> . <b>Scriabin</b> Pf Wks. <i>Kim, E.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>MS1745</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Portrait of an Artist. <i>Johnson, A/MAV SO/Mercurio.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>MS1711</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Refraction – Wks for Vn & Pf. <i>Woods, A &amp; R.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>MS1689</b>	
<b>MUSICA FICTA</b>	
<b>Guillemain</b> Second Livre de sonates en quatuor, Op 17. <i>Ens La Française.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>MF8034</b>	
<b>NAXOS</b>	<i>naxos.com</i>
<b>Brusa</b> Orch Wks, Vol 4. <i>Ulster Orch/Rustioni.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 574263</b>	
<b>Giuliani</b> Rossiniane. <i>Krivokapić.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 574272</b>	
<b>Harris, R</b> Face. Sym No 6. <i>Sols/Auckland PO/Bellincampi/Hermus.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 573994</b>	
<b>Haydn, M</b> Missa Sancti Nicolai Tolentini. Chor Wks. <i>Sols/St Alban's Cath Ch/Lawes Baroque Plyrs/Winpenny.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 574163</b>	
<b>Kontogiorgos</b> Kaleidoscope – Gtr Wks. <i>Kanellakis, P/Nina.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 579084</b>	
<b>Legrenzi</b> Complete, Op 7. <i>Valotti/Nova Ars Cantandi/Acciai.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 579086</b>	
<b>Mosolov</b> Hp Conc. Sym No 5. <i>Fleshman/Moscow SO/Arnold, A.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 574102</b>	











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<b>Novák</b> Orch Wks, Vol 1. <i>Moravian PO/Štilec.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 574226</b>	
<b>Reich</b> City Life. Eight Lines. <i>Holst Sinfonietta/Simon, K.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 559682</b>	
<b>Rossini</b> Matilde di Shabran. <i>Sols/Passionart Orch/Pérez-Sierra.</i> <span>🇸</span> <span>📀</span> <b>8 660492/4</b>	
<b>Scarlatti, D</b> Cpte Kybd Sons, Vol 26. <i>Vlahek.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 574221</b>	
<b>Schubert</b> 30 Minuets with Trios. <i>Lebhardt.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 574145</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Art of Agony: Australian Wks for Two Pianists. <i>Viney-Grinberg Duo.</i> <span>🇩</span> <b>8 579075</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Idil Biret Archive: Best of Chbr Music. <i>Various artists.</i> <span>🇸</span> <span>📀</span> <span>📀</span> <b>8 504057</b>	
<b>NEW AMSTERDAM</b>	<i>newamrecords.com</i>
<b>Perich</b> Drift Multiply. <i>Perkins.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>7559 79181-9</b>	
<b>ONYX</b>	<i>onyxclassics.com</i>
<b>Beethoven</b> Vn Sons Nos 7 & 10. <i>Ehnes/Armstrong.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>ONYX4209</b>	
<b>ORANGE MOUNTAIN MUSIC</b>	<i>orangemountainmusic.com</i>
<b>Glass</b> Escape – Arrs for Gtr. <i>Cousins.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>OMM0148</b>	
<b>PAN CLASSICS</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Perensi Manuscript. <i>Schwarz.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PC10421</b>	
<b>PASSACAILLE</b>	<i>passacaille.be</i>
<b>Rabassa</b> Astro nuevo. <i>Seville Baroque Orch/Onofri.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PAS1071</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Arte scordatura: Vn Wks from Biber to Tartini. <i>Hirosaki.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PAS1080</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Nature's Secret Whispering. <i>Sols/Conc Palatino/Dickey.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PAS1073</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Stiile Klagen. <i>Gardellino.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PAS1040</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Wks from the Düben Collection. <i>Wörner/Kirchheim Düben Consort.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PAS1081</b>	
<b>PAVANE</b>	
<b>Vanherenthals</b> Four Baroque Stes for Solo Db. <i>Grolier.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>ADW7593</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Pages intimes. <i>De May.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>ADW7597</b>	
<b>PAVLÍK</b>	<i>pavlikrecords.sk</i>
<b>Irshai</b> Nuclear Sax. <i>Sax Syncopators.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PA0182-2-13</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Cantūs Moraviae. <i>Pala.</i> <span>🇫</span> <span>📀</span> <b>PA0172-2-132</b>	
<b>PENTATONE</b>	<i>pentatonemusic.com</i>
<b>Puccini</b> Tabarro. <i>Sols incl Moore &amp; Jagde/Dresden PO/Janowski.</i> <span>🇫</span> <span>📀</span> <b>PTC5186 773</b>	
<b>Schubert</b> Schöne Müllerin. <i>Bostridge/Giorgini.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PTC5186 775</b>	
<b>Schubert</b> Stg Qt No 14. <i>Signum Qt.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PTC5186 732</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Mon ami, mon amour – Wks for Vc & Pf. <i>Haimovitz/Kodama.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PTC5186 816</b>	
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Slavonic Reflections – Pf Wks (pp2008-09). <i>Akopian-Tamarina.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PTC5186 756</b>	
<b>PIANO CLASSICS</b>	<i>piano-classics.com</i>
<b>Guastavino</b> Pf Wks. <i>Madrigal.</i> <span>🇫</span> <b>PCL10203</b>	
<b>PRIMA CLASSIC</b>	<i>primaclassic.com</i>
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<b>PROFIL</b>	<i>haensslerprofil.de</i>
<b>Various Cpsrs</b> Edition, Vol 2 (r1940-63). <i>Gilels.</i> <span>🇸</span> <span>📀</span> <span>📀</span> <b>PH17066</b>	
<b>RAMÉE</b>	<i>outhere-music.com/ramee</i>
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<b>REGENT</b>	<i>regent-records.co.uk</i>
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<b>RESONUS</b>	<i>resonusclassics.com</i>
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<b>RICERCAR</b>	<i>outhere-music.com/ricercar</i>
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













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<b>Matteis I</b> Diverse bizzarie sopra la vecchia sarabanda o pur ciaccona <b>69</b> Sarabanda amorosa <b>69</b> Suite in G <b>69</b> Variations on La folia (Divisions on a Ground) <b>69</b>	<b>Prokofiev</b> Cinderella – Three Pieces, Op 95 <b>58</b> Gavotte, Op 95 No 2 <b>58</b> Piano Concerto No 2, Op 16 <b>58</b> Piano Sonata No 8, Op 84 <b>58</b> Sarcasms, Op 17 <b>58</b> Symphonies – No 1, ‘Classical’, Op 25; No 2, Op 40; No 3, Op 44  <b>57</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Szymanowski</b> Mythes, Op 30 – La fontaine d’Arethuse <b>69</b>	<b>Weir</b> Drop down, ye heavens, from above <b>86</b>  Like to the falling of a star <b>86</b>
<b>Matteis II</b> Fantasias – in A minor; in C minor ‘con discretione’ <b>69</b>	<b>Puccini</b> Il tabarro  <b>96</b>	<b>Saint-Saëns</b> Carnival of the Animals <b>60</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Whitacre</b> Lux aurumque <b>86</b>
<b>Mealor</b> Ave maris stella <b>86</b>	<b>D Purcell</b> Sonata No 6 <b>69</b>	<b>Satie</b> Gymnopédie No 1 <b>79</b>	<b>Tabakova</b> Good-will to men, and peace on Earth <b>86</b>	<b>Wieniawski</b> Polonaise de concert, Op 4 <b>69</b>
<b>Messenger</b> Fortunio   <b>94</b>	<b>H Purcell</b> Blow, Boreas, blow, Z589 <b>84</b> Chaconne ‘Two in one upon a ground’, Z627 <b>84</b> Close thine eyes and sleep secure, Z184 <b>84</b> Come, my hearts, play your parts, Z246 <b>84</b> From those serene and rapturous joys, Z326 <b>84</b> O all ye people, clap your hands, Z138 <b>84</b> O praise the Lord, all ye heathen, Z43 <b>84</b>	<b>Scheidt</b> Puer natus in Bethlehem <b>88</b>	<b>Tallis</b> Videte miraculum <b>88</b>	<b>Y</b>
<b>Messiaen</b> Turangalila-Symphonic <b>56</b>	<b>O all ye people, clap your hands, Z138</b> <b>84</b>	<b>Schubert</b> Notturmo, D897 <b>66</b> Piano Trio No 2, D929 <b>66</b> Sonatensatz, D28 <b>66</b> String Quartets – No 4, D46; No 12, ‘Quartettsatz’, D703; No 14, ‘Death and the Maiden’, D810 <b>66</b> Symphony No 4, ‘Tragic’, D417 <b>106</b>	<b>Thalberg</b> L’art du chant appliqué au piano, Op 70  <b>79</b> Auf Flügeln des Gesanges (Mendelssohn)  <b>79</b> Mi manca la voce (from Rossini’s ‘Mosè in Egitto’)  <b>79</b> Three Schubert Lieder, Op 79 <i>a</i>  <b>79</b>	<b>Young</b> The Owl <b>86</b>
<b>Monteverdi</b> Orfeo <b>94</b>	<b>O praise the Lord, all ye heathen, Z43</b> <b>84</b>	<b>Schumann</b> Arabeske, Op 18 <b>77</b> Frauenliebe und -leben, Op 42 <b>82</b> Kinderszenen, Op 15 <b>77</b> Kreisleriana, Op 16 <b>77</b> Romance, Op 28 No 2 <b>77</b> Three String Quartets, Op 41 <b>66</b> Vogel als Prophet, Op 82 No 7 <b>77</b>	<b>AR Thomas</b> The Auditions <b>67</b> Avian Capriccio <b>67</b> Plea for Peace <b>67</b> Ripple Effects <b>67</b> Selene <b>67</b> Two Thoughts About the Piano <b>67</b> Your Kiss <b>67</b>	<b>Z</b>
<b>Morales</b> Peccantem me quotidie <b>88</b>	<b>Overture, Z771</b> <b>84</b>	<b>Scriabin</b> Piano Concerto, Op 20 <b>58</b>	<b>Todd</b> Christ is the Morning Star <b>86</b>	<b>Zapolsky</b> Rêverie (arr Balakirev) <b>72</b>
<b>Morpurgo</b> Grandpa Christmas <b>60</b>	<b>Prelude, Z773</b> <b>69</b>	<b>Serrano</b> La canción del olvido, ‘Marinela, Marinela’ <b>88</b>	<b>V</b>	<b>Collections</b>
<b>Morricone</b> Once Upon a Time in America – Deborah’s Theme <b>79</b>	<b>Rejoice in the Lord alway, Z49</b> <b>84</b>	<b>Shapero</b> Credo  <b>60</b> On Green Mountain  <b>60</b> Partita  <b>60</b> Serenade  <b>60</b> Sinfonia  <b>60</b>	<b>Vaughan Williams</b> Six English Folk Songs <b>85</b> Folk Songs from Sussex <b>85</b> Scenes adapted from Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress <b>60</b> Sea Songs from The Motherland Song Book, Vol 4 <b>85</b> Symphony No 5 <b>60</b>	‘100 for 100: Musical Decades of Freedom’ – Various artists <b>102</b>
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<b>Mouton</b> Nesciens mater <b>88</b>	<b>Thy genius, lo!, Z604</b> <b>84</b>	<b>Sibelius</b> Kullervo  <b>105</b> Symphonies – cpte  <b>105</b>	<b>Vidales</b> Alleluia: Crastina die <b>86</b> Los que fueren de buen gusto <b>86</b>	‘Christmas in Puebla’ – Siglo de Oro <b>86</b>
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<b>O</b>	<b>Rachmaninov</b> Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 <b>79</b>			‘Heaven Full of Stars’ – Vasari Singers <b>86</b>
<b>Obradors</b> Del cabello más sutil <b>88</b>	<b>Rahbani</b> Sahar El Layali (Kan Enna Tahoun) <b>88</b>			‘Labyrinth’ – Khatia Buniatishvili <b>79</b>
<b>O’Regan</b> The Phoenix  <b>95</b>	<b>Rameau</b> Les Boréades <b>96</b>			‘The Mad Lover’ – Théotime Langlois de Swarte, Thomas Dunford <b>69</b>
<b>P</b>				‘The Mozart & Haydn Recordings on Mercury Living Presence’ – Antal Dorati <b>106</b>
<b>Padilla</b> A la xácara xacarilla <b>86</b> Christum natus est <b>86</b> Deus in adiutorium meum intende <b>86</b> Joseph fili David <b>86</b> Missa Joseph fili David <b>86</b> Tollite portas <b>86</b>				‘El Nour’ – Fatma Said <b>88</b>
				‘The Oslo Years’ – Mariss Jansons <b>105</b>
				‘Sacred Treasures of Christmas’ – The London Oratory Schola Cantorum <b>88</b>
				‘Sacred Treasures of Spain’ – The London Oratory Schola Cantorum <b>88</b>
				‘To Roman Totenberg’ – Nathan Meltzer <b>69</b>
				‘Wilhelm Kempff Edition’ <b>100</b>



# Edward Dusingberre

The first violin of the Colorado-based Takács Quartet on Beethoven's timeless message

Yesterday – with counting for the US Election still underway and everyone on tenterhooks – I was working with our very talented graduate string quartet, the Ivalas Quartet. They are from the black and latinx communities. Right now it is deeply uncomfortable to be in this country which is supposed to embrace many different races and nationalities. They were working on the second movement of Op 127, which they'll be playing in a concert in a couple of weeks. We talked first about how hard it is to concentrate at the moment, and then they sat down and played the whole of this beautiful, slow movement. I found it so moving because it's music that requires such complete empathy between four people. And so yesterday of all days it was a nice experience just feeling that 250 years after his birth Beethoven's music is still challenging us to be better.

My first Beethoven experience that I remember very clearly was listening to my grandfather, John Stainer, who was the Registrar at the Royal College of Music. After his retirement, my grandparents had a cottage in Shropshire, and we used to go and visit for holidays. He was a good pianist and had a lovely Bechstein, and that's really where I heard a lot of the Beethoven piano sonatas for the first time. There was just this sense of delight and wonder and exploration in his playing that has really stayed with me all these years. As a 10-year-old after playing football all afternoon in the garden, and nicking a few raspberries from his fruit trees, coming in and hearing late Beethoven sonatas, it was brilliant. And I think that music just got into my system subconsciously.

My second powerful experience was actually when I was a student at the RCM. I was, like many young violinists, not always enamoured of orchestra rehearsals. And there was a string sectional on the *Eroica* Symphony one particular Thursday evening that I definitely didn't want to be at. John Ludlow was taking the rehearsal. I don't remember anything about it except the beginning of the slow movement, and playing the melody. I thought it sounded okay and wasn't quite sure why we were spending any time on it, honestly. And he just busted our balls. He gave us such a hard time, the violins, for not being inside the character of the music and he really pushed us. It stuck with me because I could see the fire in his eyes as he was talking about this music. I felt really ashamed for my attitude. That was the first time I really realized what I've felt throughout my life, particularly with Beethoven, that it puts these demands on you. It stretches you so far, and way beyond what you think you're possibly capable of. I wasn't in the right space to be thinking about the sort of tragedy that's behind that music. And that's exactly what you have to do at 7.30 on a Thursday evening ... or indeed any evening. So I'm very grateful to him.

I very clearly remember opening the music for the first movement of Op 130 – the first late quartet that I really worked on – and getting to the development section, and



## THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

**Beethoven** Piano Sonata No 31 in A flat, Op 110  
Richard Goode Nonesuch

If I had to take one piece, Op 110 – from beginning to end – is a wonder. In a way, this takes me back to that early experience with my grandfather

actually just being in complete disbelief that any composer would think that they could write something like that for violin. I was just laughing and incredulous, because it's extremely hard ... and hard *technically*. The trouble is, it's not an étude, it's not a sort of flashy caprice – it should sound with a lot of musical meaning even when you're going all over the fingerboard. I think partly there's an idealism in the writing for the strings in that Beethoven sounds like he couldn't care less about the practicalities of playing the instrument. So you have this sense of him kind of shaking his fist and having a good laugh at you at the same time.

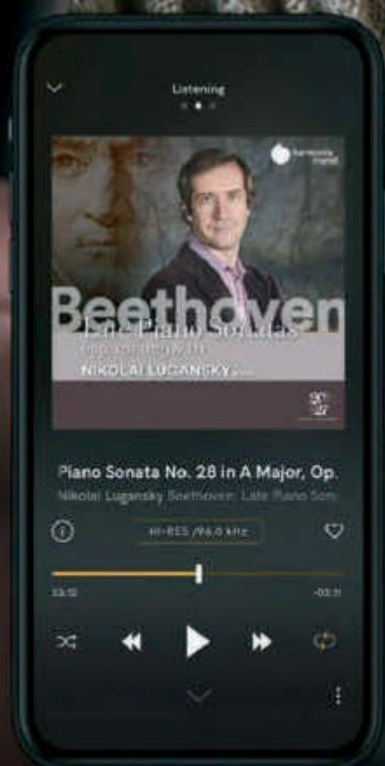
As part of learning the quartets I spent a summer studying the piano sonatas while teaching at the Taos School of Music in New Mexico. I had a ground floor apartment that looked out onto a mountain stream with a bench right next to the river. And the second week when I wasn't so busy I sat outside and listened to Richard Goode's recordings of all the late piano sonatas, while studying the scores. And it was just a revelation. It's funny, with recordings, but the very first time that you feel like you've discovered a piece of music, then you always have a particular gratitude for that recording. **G**





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